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## Congo Gods



# CONGO GODS

by  
OTTO LUTKEN

Translated from the Danish



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**TO  
EVAN**





# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. GENESIS . . . . .	II
II. "VERS L'AVENIR" . . . . .	17
III. MASUA'S PLAN . . . . .	33
IV. MASUA EN ROUTE . . . . .	49
V. LUCIEN EN ROUTE . . . . .	69
VI. LUCIEN MEETS YAJA . . . . .	97
VII. THE BLACK EROS . . . . .	115
VIII. MASUA'S MIRACLE . . . . .	125
IX. LUCIEN LOSES YAJA . . . . .	141
X. BANGSBO AND YAJA . . . . .	157
XI. LUCIEN'S SECOND TERM . . . . .	163
XII. "THE WHITE MAN'S BURDEN" . . . . .	177
XIII. MASUA AND YAJA . . . . .	183
XIV. REVENGE . . . . .	201
XV. CONGO LOVE . . . . .	209
XVI. STORM CLOUDS . . . . .	219
XVII. THE BANQUET . . . . .	233
XVIII. THE LAST ACT . . . . .	249



## Congo Gods



## CHAPTER I

### GENESIS

**MOZURI** was an ordinary witch doctor of **Lu-fari's** village in the lower Congo,—and not a particularly powerful one, at that. He had a pair of great coal-black eyes set back in a network of wrinkles. When they blinked they gave an impression of incredible slyness and craftiness, but at other times they shone with the ecstasy of fanaticism. His forehead was elaborately tattooed, and his cheeks were lacerated with ancient scars, and from his neck hung a pair of inflated hog bladders,—symbols of the human spirit, and a string of tarnished, worm-eaten leopard teeth,—symbols of human prowess. He was a fearsome spectacle.

Mozuri's version of Genesis, as he explained

## CONGO GODS

it to the lads of Lufari's village when he initiated them into the first mysteries of religion, was not without a certain reasonableness.

This is what he said, old Mozuri, counselor to Lufari, witch doctor and soothsayer:

"The white men cherish many curious superstitions. Perhaps the most curious is their belief that their God created the whole world.

"This is manifestly untrue, for our God, Chembe, the God of the black man, created the country that lies nearest the sun.

"He is the mightiest of all the Gods. He is *Mungo-Monene*, the Great Spirit, and in him are housed all the Departed Spirits. He existed in the beginning, when there was nothing but water everywhere, and his name then was Boumbe. After he had feasted well, and was content, he would smoke his great pipe, and the smoke that poured forth from his pipe became the clouds that cover the heavens.

"And one day after he had feasted he felt a violent pain in his belly, and from his mouth he

## GENESIS

belched forth the sun and the moon and all the stars, so that there was light and heat. And in time the sun dried up the water that was everywhere, and the sandbanks that appeared above the surface of the water became the land.

“And of his ordure Chembe created animals and men, and he peopled the whole earth with them. And then, to pass the time away, he arranged the men in tribes and nations, and to each tribe he gave a different taboo and a different fetish. You can see that this is true from the fact that every man still has his taboo, and every tribe its fetish. . . .

“The world is full of liars, and there are none greater than the witch doctors of the white men. They tell us, for example, that all men are brothers. All of you know that this is a lie. Not even the white men themselves are brothers, for they are divided into Belgians and Englishmen and Arabians. And then there are the Portuguese, who are also white. Do any of you think that they are brothers, these white men



## CONGO GODS

of different nations? They are no more brothers than we are brothers to the Dvargene whom Chembe drove into the great forests when he gave us all the land and the rivers.

"The white men are white all the way into their souls, and their taboo is man. They are such cowards that they dare not even eat the hearts of their enemies. . . ."

All this, and much more, Mozuri told to the lads of Lufari's village. But Masua, the chief's son, who was born with doubt in his heart, thought that most of it was nonsense.

Along with a great deal of more or less useful but on the whole quite incorrect information, little Lucien Dubois of Malines, Belgium, learned that God created Heaven and Earth and made man in His image. It was Father Daniels, he who later went to the Belgian Congo as a missionary, who taught him this, and Lucien was not the lad to question anything from so authoritative a source.

## GENESIS

Had he been born in the little village of Lufari on the banks of the Kasai, mightiest and most turbulent of all the rivers that flow into the great Congo, he would have accepted Mozuri's explanation of Genesis just as unquestioningly as he did Father Daniels'. For Lucien, who had been brought up as a well-behaved and obedient youth, never doubted anything that had the stamp of authority. He was, in other words, an average person.

This is the story of Lucien and Masua, and of some of the other men and women whom Mozuri's God created, and to whom he gave different taboos and fetishes.



## CHAPTER II

### “VERS L’AVENIR”

LITTLE Lucien Dubois—the adjective “little” clung to him all his life, though he was not particularly small in stature—had just turned nineteen when he signed up for service in the Belgian Congo as a second-class clerk, the lowest position in the civil administration, carrying with it the dizzy salary of 1,500 francs a year, and free passage, free board, free medical attention and eventually free burial. If he survived he might hope to receive 1,800 francs a year.

Let it not be supposed that so momentous a step was taken light-heartedly. On the contrary, Lucien’s decision to bury himself in darkest Africa was born of desperation, and was not carried through without a terrific struggle with his family. Indeed, the dispute almost led to

## CONGO GODS

blows, for old Dubois fumed and raged, and swore that a good hiding would cure the youngster of his Congo fever.

"Congo" was, at that time, a word to send shivers up and down the spines of all good Belgian burghers and to scare children out of a month's growth. And not without cause. Year after year the death lists mounted and the Congo Minotaur exacted an ever larger toll. To Lucien himself his decision seemed equivalent to suicide—with all proper formalities, and he thought that it made a fitting and heroic climax to the tragedy of his young life.

Lucien's father was an industrious shoemaker of Malines who shared with his loyal and dutiful wife, Gretel, one consuming ambition—to make little Lucien a "Monsieur." The University and even the gymnasium had proved beyond their modest means, but by skimping and saving and by placing his sisters in service as soon as they were confirmed, they had succeeded in keeping

## “VERS L’AVENIR”

the lad at school until he was fourteen and then in sending him to a business school for two years.

Unfortunately for their ambitions, Lucien was not at all talented. In fact, there wasn't much spirit or initiative in him, though he was a good boy and well behaved. After he had finished his course at the business school, a well-disposed uncle secured for him a position as clerk in Tietz Brothers Department Store,—Grand Bazar d'Anspach, Brussels. Here for two years he earned 75 francs a month, and then in recognition of his faithfulness, was promoted to the rank of third assistant at the stationery counter and raised to 90 francs a month.

Poor Lucien was no salesman. Bashful and self-conscious, he would trip over his own legs in his eagerness to wait upon a customer, and then stare at him with dumb embarrassment instead of pressing his sale. Only on rare occasions could he muster up enough courage to offer more than the polite interrogation, “Could I be of any service to you, madame?” So in the

## CONGO GODS

end he was transferred to the packing department, where he wrote addresses and kept records from morning to night. This task was perfectly suited to him, and he performed it with notable proficiency. But the transfer, while it carried with it a slight increase in salary—he was advanced to 100 francs a month—closed the door to any advancement and left Lucien in a rut. Unless something very unusual happened, he was destined to spend the rest of his life addressing parcels with no prospect of ever earning a salary on which he could live decently or support a wife. And, knowing all this, he proceeded to fall in love.

Miss Marietta Fromont of the greeting card department, just across the aisle from Lucien, was so beautiful that she was able to sell record quantities of cards even in the off seasons. From admiration of her salesmanship, Lucien had soon progressed to admiration of her charms, and before long he found himself centering in her all his dreams and hopes and ambitions,—all, he

## “VERS L’AVENIR”

told himself, of life’s significance. And of course his passion was quite hopeless and quite unrequited.

The fact is that little Lucien simply didn’t appeal to girls. He was a decent lad; in fact, his character was quite above reproach, but two years in the capital hadn’t matured him much, and he was still almost as shy and awkward and unsophisticated as when he first came to the city. He spent his life between Tietz Brothers Department Store and his little room in Rue Neuf, wrote his mother regularly twice a week, and whiled away the long winter evenings with romances from M. Reumert’s circulating library or with friends from the Church of Our Lady over on Rue Albert. He had never ventured inside a real café, if one excepts the little “Liberty” down in Rue des Cordonniers, where he ate his modest lunch and worshiped Marietta when she too came there—usually in the last days of the month.

During the sales and stock-taking, when they



## CONGO GODS

had to work until late at night, he and Marietta used to eat their frugal supper together there,—a plate of mussels or a small steak with boiled potatoes and a glass of Bock beer. Though neither sales nor inventories were infrequent, Lucien made little progress toward winning his lady's favor. Yet his devotion was not altogether in vain. After all, it was something to be allowed to sit at her table, and even to take her to supper, on occasion. And one unforgettable Sunday he enjoyed the honor of taking her to the movies.

In all probability she permitted him to hold her hand on this great occasion. At any rate she would have if he had asked her, or if he had attempted it, but it may be that he hadn't dared to try it, for Lucien was very shy indeed. Besides, he was tremendously interested in the film. It was a picture about the Congo,—not a story with a plot, a hero and a heroine, but an educational film. It was, in fact, propaganda dispensed by the government to awaken inter-

est among the people of Belgium for their Congo colony. But Lucien didn't know that.

There were splendid pictures of the Congo-land, with great palm trees waving in the wind and the sun, and there were pictures, too, of a great river, broad and turbulent as a diminutive ocean, its waves sparkling in the sunlight, its waters floating dozens of long canoes filled with shining black men. There were other pictures of half-naked negroes, sweating under a burden of ivory tusks or swinging baskets of rubber—Africa's liquid gold. And at the very close there came a picture of a tiny negro girl whose sloe-black eyes gazed fearsomely at the audience, while the frame slowly closed to a ring around her face. Then, just as the circle focussed to a point the child must have caught sight of something that amused her, for she broke into sudden laughter and threw a quick coquettish glance straight at Lucien.

Such was Lucien's first meeting with Yaja.

From that same evening dated the conjunc-

## CONGO GODS

tion of events that started him on his long journey to the Congo. To his distress his horizon was suddenly darkened—and Marietta's, too, as events were to prove—by the appearance of an unknown gentleman. The fascinating stranger was a tall, blond, heavy-limbed Swede, a Captain in the Congo marine, who, after consuming sundry glasses of beer, had been seized with a craving for some mussels, and had stumbled by chance into the "Liberty" where Lucien and Marietta had sought a late supper after the show. Lucien had suggested, half-heartedly, that this evening they might find some more fashionable place, but he had been overruled. There was, Marietta argued, no use in throwing away five or six francs for food which the "Liberty" provided at half that sum. Lucien was too timid to insist further. Had he only mustered the courage to do so . . .

That the Swedish Captain who blustered in and settled himself at a near-by table was a gentleman there could be no doubt. His over-

coat was lined with expensive velvet, and Lucien caught sight of a gold embroidered monogram on the lining of the pocket. Running his eye over the blue suit with the assurance of an expert, Lucien appraised it at 200 francs. (Holmsteen had actually paid 350 for it, but then foreigners were always overcharged most outrageously) and the heavy fur-lined pigskin gloves he estimated at just about half his own month's salary. That silk tie cost, at Teitz, exactly 19.95 francs and the Captain was filling his B.B.B. pipe with sweet aromatic Virginia tobacco out of a crocodile skin pouch. Beyond doubt, he was a gentleman.

There was about him an air of distinction. He had a suavity and poise that impressed Lucien at once. Unfortunately they impressed Marietta even more.

As for Captain Holmsteen, he was fresh from three years in the Congo and three months on his native heaths of Gottland, and he found Marietta positively bewitching. Without the

## CONGO GODS

loss of a minute he determined to take her by storm and commenced the preliminary maneuvers.

Now let it not be thought for a moment that Marietta was the kind of a girl who made overtures to strange gentlemen, however handsome they might be. Had Lucien not been along it is probable that the affair would not have progressed beyond a few flirtatious glances—though for that matter, one never can tell. The tone of Père Gabardin's café was anything but formal, and Holmsteen would doubtless have found some way to break the ice. As it was, however, Lucien himself chose to make the overtures to the dashing Captain, and so the introduction was performed with due regard for the proprieties.

Marietta soon discovered that she had found the man of her dreams, the man she was waiting for—her Prince Charming. And despite his obvious wealth and his worldly-wisdom, the Captain did not appear to be the kind of a man

## “VERS L’AVENIR”

that a pretty young girl who earns her living as a clerk has cause to be afraid of. A perfect gentleman, he could be audacious without impertinence; his aggressiveness had no suggestion of vulgarity, and his flatteries were without insinuations. Marietta's little heart was soon beating as it had never beaten before. . . . It was a clear case of love at first sight.

Poor little Lucien's heart, too, beat faster that evening, but it was not from love. As Marietta's spirits rose, his fell lower and lower. The first evening was followed by others until at the end of the week Lucien was in unutterable misery. His sufferings were the more refined in that Marietta claimed him as her cousin, and insisted that he chaperon her and Holmsteen, thus making him a constant witness to the progress of their love.

There were, of course, certain advantages. Lucien saw three musical comedies and innumerable movies, and consumed more delicacies in a few weeks than in all of his previous nine-

## CONGO GODS

teen years. But these pleasures were salted with bitterness. What was even the most gorgeous musical comedy in comparison with his passion, or caviar to his jealousy? It embarrassed him too, poor lad, that he could not afford to treat when it was his turn, nor could he drink glass to glass with this blond Viking whom wine seemed to make only the more irresistible.

Lucien's sufferings were even more bitter when Marietta began to find his cousinly chaperonage superfluous—as Holmsteen had from the beginning. Then the pangs of jealousy became almost unbearable. And his was too gentle a nature to find relief in anger or hasty words. He had no hot temper to serve as a safety valve. So he suffered in silence—and in vain.

Meantime the love of Marietta and Captain Holmsteen grew apace, as did their intimacy. She went with him to the Spring Carnival at Hotel d'Angleterre in an adorable baby costume that he had given her, and Lucien, who could

not afford to go—and could find on one to go with, anyhow—Lucien had to look on while his rival stole away his girl. Yet he indulged in no dramatics. His was a sweet nature, and a simple one, and he resigned himself to a sort of exquisite martyrdom. Because he took it so nicely, and because he was a useful lad in running errands for her, Marietta allowed him to view her in all her finery before her knight came to carry her off to the carnival. And even while he was lost in admiration, the Captain called for her in a cab. She threw open her window and waved to him, and then, just before she left, took Lucien by the chin and turned his face to the light. Perhaps he had been crying, poor child, for his face was melancholy and his eyes were red, and Marietta felt a sudden surge of sympathy and affection for him. She kissed him lightly on both cheeks and ran along.

Every one will admit that of the two it was Lucien, and not Holmsteen, who had the right to be jealous, and yet when the latter saw



## CONGO GODS

through the window the unhappy lover (it would be silly to call him a rival) in Marietta's room, his jealousy was aroused and he suspected at once some concealed relationship between the two. So unreasonable can a man be when his own intentions are not strictly honorable!

Perhaps it was this shabby suspicion, this unjust jealousy, that led Captain Holmsteen to bring his affair with Marietta to a climax that evening. He was infatuated with her, and though a sophisticated young lady, she was no match for the dashing Swedish Captain. And, after all, a carnival is a carnival. . . . So things went wrong, if indeed it is wrong to love,—a matter about which there are various opinions.

The eventual result of Marietta's indiscretion and Holmsteen's infatuation was an adorable little blue-eyed, dark-haired Swede, a mixture of Goth and Wallon. And Holmsteen conducted himself like the gentleman he was by allowing Marietta to draw 200 francs a

month on his account. He himself returned to the Congo long before the baby was born, and thus passed out of Marietta’s—and Lucien’s—life forever.

It is Lucien, after all, that we are concerned with—poor little Lucien, defeated in love. Marietta’s affair with Holmsteen and his own sorry part in it affected him so profoundly that he determined to leave Belgium forever. Unbeknownst to his parents or to Marietta, he applied for a position in the Congo, took the preliminary examinations, and was accepted.

There was weeping and wailing and bitter words in the little home in Malines when Lucien announced his decision; and, as we have seen, old Dubois got up on a high horse with a whip in his hand and tried to forbid this folly. But all to no purpose. Lucien had come through the fire and was tempered to a harder steel now. That night, a few weeks after the carnival, when Marietta had confided in him that she was going to have a baby, he had been at the point

## CONGO GODS

of suicide. Now he felt himself to be a grown man, with the hand of sorrow on his brow (this wonderful phrase from a film he had seen helped him to endure his fate) and he bore himself with a new dignity that surprised himself and quite disconcerted his old father.

He spoke grandly of a career, of a future, of ambition, and, supported by his mother, he had his way.

So one fine day while the grenadier regimental band played *Vers l'Avenir*—"Toward the Future"—the national song of the independent Congo Free State, and *Brabanconne*, Lucien waved good-by to his mamma and his two sisters who had managed to get off from work for the great occasion, and steamed down the Scheldt on one of the huge white boats that ply between Antwerp and the Congo. Out on the North Sea through the English Channel and into the Atlantic, on toward darkest Africa with its primeval forests, its barbarism, its deadly fevers—*vers l'Avenir*.

## CHAPTER III

### MASUA'S PLAN

WHILE this tragi-comedy of Lucien's fate was being enacted in Malines, far away in darkest Africa, in Lufari's village on the banks of the mighty Kasai, another drama slowly unfolded itself. The Commander of the military post at Italemba had just informed Lufari that the King expected his village to coöperate in the defense of the province to the extent of six volunteers—recruits to the *force publique*. If this number were not forthcoming within seven days, the Commander promised to come and take them.

Lufari knew from long experience what this ultimatum meant, and so he chose the six "volunteers" from among his own slaves. It was then that there occurred a wholly unprecedented

## CONGO GODS

and highly dramatic event. Masua, Lufari's son, the doubter, the mocker of old men's wisdom,—Masua announced his intention to accompany the soldiers to the camp of the white men.

Of course there was a tremendous stir. After all, Masua was the son of the chief, and was one day to succeed his father as head of the village. Old Lufari thundered and stormed just as, back in Malines, old Dubois had thundered and stormed at Lucien, and to no better success. But whereas little Lucien had gained his way by whimpering, by covert threats of suicide, and by setting his mother against his father, Masua chose to defend his decision with well-reasoned words,—with words that convinced by their eloquence, fascinated by their glamour, and inspired by their daring.

Not for nothing was he the son of Lufari and of his head-wife, she who was herself descended from the first head-wife of the village, and who, alone among the women, participated in the meetings of the Basenge people that she

## MASUA'S PLAN

might safeguard the interests of her sex. The blood of generations of chieftains coursed in Masua's veins, and he possessed the chieftain's *mayele*,—the wisdom of the Gods that gave him power over others and enabled him to think not for himself alone, but for the whole tribe.

Upon Masua's declaration of his intentions the village council was summoned, and after several hours of palaver it sent for Lufari's son in order to lay down the law to him. But instead Masua himself took the floor. Standing in the middle of the circle of old men, he conquered them with their own weapon,—the spoken word,—and that so completely that their gray beards twitched and their jaws sagged in amazement at the lad's supernatural wisdom. They stared at him unbelieving as he talked, leaned forward from their hips and cupped their hands behind their ears that they might not miss one of the winged words. They opened up the ears of their souls, and in the pauses between Masua's sentences they thought that they heard

## CONGO GODS

the low, humming sound made by the wings of the invisible spirits who had gathered for this momentous occasion.

Was this indeed Masua, he whom they had despised for his ignorance and his unbelief, this young man, straight as a spear, with glowing black eyes, who stood before them and took their own confused and inarticulate ideas and gave them life and fashioned them into a coherent, reasoned plan? Verily *Mungo-Monene* himself must have inspired the lad!

Even old Mozuri, the witch doctor, who knew a little about the source of Masua's inspiration, was astonished at his eloquence. Old age, he muttered, can think great thoughts, but only youth can give them life.

"Listen to me, ye old men," Masua said. "You know who I am. I am Masua. Am I not Masua, son of Lufari?"

He felt the need of the reassuring murmur that ran around the circle, for now that he was transfigured with a new, a great idea, an idea

### MASUA'S PLAN

that was about to wrench him out of the security of the customary, he needed to be sure of his own identity. There is a comforting security in instinct and custom and habit, but ideas are fragile canoes in which to embark on the turbulent currents of the stream of life.

"Listen to me, ye old men," Masua continued. "I am Masua. I know that it is bold and presumptuous of a young man to speak among the elders, but this is a matter that concerns the young as well as the old—yea even more than it does the old. Therefore I must speak what is in my heart.

"It is about the soldiers that Bula-Matadi, the white master, demands of us that I must speak. All of you are familiar with the evil magic that the white men use when they wage war,—the magic and death that are in the roar of their guns when they stand all in a row and shoot as one man. You know how the thunder and lightning of the guns paralyze the reason, and how the bullets tear and kill.



## CONGO GODS

"Even I, who am but a youth, know these things. Do I not carry on me the scars of battle?" And he turned so that all might see on his thigh the long red gash of an albuli bullet.

"This magic power is no witchcraft," he continued, "but a *mayele*. It is the white man's *mayele* that directs the soldiers, that tells them when to fire, when to advance, when to withdraw. It is this power—the wisdom of the white man, that is irresistible. . . .

"But who are the soldiers of the white masters—the soldiers who stand in line and shoot us down when they are told to? Are they, too, white men, brought afar from n'Putu, the white men's land?

"No. They are black men like us, men from this village or that, from all the nations and tribes of the Congo,—from Bagansi and Gombe and Isaka. And all of them are black like us.

"For the whites are exceeding cunning. They send Bagansi men to fight the men from Kasai, and soldiers from Kasai to fight those

### MASUA'S PLAN

of Bagansi. They send men from Batatele to fight the men of Balolo, and soldiers from Balolo to fight those of Batatele. And they will send me and my father's slaves to Bagansi or to Matamba and we will have to shoot down the brothers of the men who are shooting down our brothers. And there will be bloodshed and hatred between the tribes of all the Congo.

"This is the white men's *mayele*, and it is a powerful one, an invincible one. By this means the white men will always find enough soldiers for their needs. And eventually all will become their slaves, and they who are few in number but very wise will rule over us who are numerous as the leaves on the trees but very foolish.

"Old men, we need be but a little less foolish and turn on the white men instead of on each other in order to shake them off as I brush an ant off my leg. . . . For the white men are very few. In all the length and breadth of the land, there are no more than in my father's village. Yet were they a hundred times as numer-

## CONGO GODS

ous we could crush them out as we crush out ants.

"Old men, never again will I question the wisdom of Mozuri, for he it was who explained to me the *mayele* of the white men.

"Hear me but a little further, and I will have done. . . . The other day after I had talked of this matter with Mozuri and my heart was heavy with woe, I went to Italemba. There I saw Bangalese soldiers standing in line, moving as one man, marching in rows as at a dance or standing in a square facing outward, turning this way and that. It was a wonderful sight and it made my heart pound in my breast in time with the tramp of the soldiers' feet.

"And where was the white man? Where was he while the black soldiers were marching back and forth in lines and columns? Did he stand out there in his uniform and direct them? Old men, he was not there at all. He was nowhere to be seen.

"Perhaps you think that he is so powerful

### MASUA'S PLAN

that he had merely to sit in his hut and direct the whole thing with his will. Listen to me. I crept up to the veranda of his house and peered through his window, and I saw him sitting on a bed, sipping red wine and playing with one of our girls,—playing with her shamelessly and in the open day. He had nothing to do with the soldiers, marching back and forth in the hot sun, for his eyes were blank and dull with wine, and he saw only his girl.

“He who commanded the soldiers, he who directed their marches, was a black man,—one of us, a man whom every one of you know, for he was born here among us,—Ikobo. He was born among us a slave, and served us until five years ago when he ran off to become a servant of the white men at Basongo, and later a soldier. . . . Ikobo has learned the white men’s *mayele*, Ikobo who five years ago was Lopari’s slave and ran away because Lopari was going to sacrifice him to the river spirits.”

Every one of the old men, and all of the peo-

## CONGO GODS

ple of Lufari's village who had crowded around, were listening intently to Masua's words. His voice rose and sank in a great silence, for nothing else was to be heard but the wind rustling gently in the leaves of the bread-fruit trees, and far, far off, the whimper of a sick child.

Whither were the words leading? All eyes were turned on the young chieftain's son, even those of old Mozuri, whose lips worked ceaselessly as he sucked on his yellowed teeth and muttered his approbation.

And now, with the unconscious art of a born orator, Masua raised his voice to a fullness like the blare of trumpets.

"Listen to me," he cried, "I am Masua. I will be a soldier and learn the *mayele* of the white man. What a mere slave like Ikobo can learn, that I, a chieftain's son, can learn with ease. And when I have learned it I will talk to all the soldiers of every tribe—to Bangala men and Kasai men and Bagansi men and Matamba men. And I will say to them, 'Let us no

## MASUA'S PLAN

longer shoot down one another, but let us rather shoot down our white masters who have brought bloodshed and strife among us.' And when the soldiers of every tribe have heard my message I will gather them together and lead them against our white masters and drive them out into the great black waters, back whence they came.

"Then we will no longer be slaves and carry rubber from the forests or mine copal or chop down trees for the fire-boats. We will once again be masters in our own villages and forests as ye old men were before the coming of Stanley and all his brood."

And then, before the mounting enthusiasm should drown him out, he motioned for silence. "Not until I return with the white men's *mayele* will I be chief," he said. "Until then the old men must rule. Until then the word of Lufari and the wisdom of Mozuri must be the law. . . . Old men, I have spoken."

Every vestige of mistrust and opposition was

## CONGO GODS

dispelled by these closing words. The circle of elders sat quite still and stared thoughtfully, marveling at the slender stripling, so ripe in wisdom. Verily, he was the mouthpiece of the gods. Nothing, he said, was to be done hurriedly, with wars and alarums. For the present he would take everything on himself. They had merely to give their assent, to watch and await developments. Perhaps he would be able to carry out his fantastic scheme: time alone would tell. For the present there was nothing to be done. It was a good plan to sit and think about in the long days.

Gradually the excited buzz and murmur died down and there was an expectant silence while all awaited the reply of the old men and the decision of the chief, Lufari. At length Mozuri leaned forward from his hips and whispered some words into Lufari's ears. The chief nodded thoughtfully a few times, stood up a little heavily, and said simply:

"It is well, Masua my son. You may go."

## MASUA'S PLAN

Masua bowed low to his father, then stood erect and looked about him. His eyes traveled slowly around the circle and there, in the very front row, caught sight of Yaja.

In her eagerness to catch every word that fell from his lips, the girl had pushed through the crowd of young men and wedged herself in among the elders, and now she stood, her sloe eyes glued to his face, waiting the moment when he would deign once more to remember her existence. . . . She captured his fleeting gaze and held it, and sent him a message which was unmistakable.

"Do you remember?" her eyes asked.

Masua had begun to be a little afraid of himself. It is one thing to dream great dreams, it is quite another to clothe them in words and to see them take on reality and life. Yaja's message brought him back to earth.

Of course he remembered—even if he had forgotten for the moment. It was a mere bagatelle, and quite easy for him to arrange. He raised



## CONGO GODS

his arm as a signal for quiet, and an expectant hush fell on the assembly.

"Yaja is to go with me," he said quietly. "I want Yaja with me, for she is my *Mamajango*, my beloved. My father, Lufari, will pay what is proper to her father, Bombo."

And now, over this matter, there was a great palaver. The council of elders, still smarting a little from the cavalier manner in which Masua had taken things into his own hands, made a great show of authority and power in this minor affair in order to bolster up their own dignity. After a lengthy and heated debate, Yaja's price was placed at ten pieces of cloth and a thousand brass bars, but it was particularly recorded that this comparatively low price was not a reflection upon the desirability of the girl, but rather a recognition of Masua's extraordinary attractiveness as a son-in-law. Lufari promised to give one piece of cloth and two hundred brass bars at once, and gave surety for the rest of the price which Masua was to pay on his return.

## MASUA'S PLAN

But Lufari, sly fellow that he was, got the wording of the contract so twisted around that he could later protest, with a show of right, that it was not he, Lufari, who was surety for the debt, but the whole village which had witnessed the contract. This resulted in endless quarrels between the Chief and the council of elders, and in the end Bombo never got the purchase price. But that is another story.



## CHAPTER IV

### MASUA EN ROUTE

THREE days later Lufari formally delivered his six "volunteers" to the white Commander at Italemba—his son Masua and five of his slaves. And Yaja was with them.

The five slaves were linked together so that they could not escape, but Masua was unfettered—except by the great words he had spoken and the promises he had made. He held in his hand one end of a ribbon that was tied loosely around Yaja's neck,—a symbol of proprietorship and an assurance of safety.

Yaja was desperately afraid—afraid of the unknown. She made no attempt to conceal her fear, but instead employed all her arts of persuasion to induce Masua to abandon his wild

## CONGO GODS

plan. At night, after the last echo of the tomtoms had been drowned out in the great silence of the forest, she snuggled up to him and whispered words that made him tremble, words that wove invisible fetters around his wrists and ankles, dangerous, lovely words against which he could only oppose a stubborn silence.

"Masua, my man," she whispered, "why do you want to go away from here? Lusaki, our friend, who has been far off to the great river and knows the whole world, says that nowhere are the bananas as sweet as in our own village, that nowhere is the wine as strong as that your father makes, and nowhere the water as clear as that we draw in our calabashes from his well. And, Masua, Lusaki says that long before you get to the river the sun burns so hot that all the grass withers up and dies, and on the other side of the great river there are no more antelopes, only fierce leopards as large as hippopotami, and huge crocodiles by the thousand." Or she would say, "Masua, my man, I talked to-day with the

## MASUA EN ROUTE

soldier's wife who came here to buy bananas and she told me that the soldiers of Bula-Matadi often went hungry and that they died like ants of disease. And listen, Masua, she told me that the soldiers' wives had to wash and to cook for all the men, because there are so few of them, and each woman has to be a wife for four or five men. Masua, these women lead lives of shame, they go from one man to another. . . . Do you want me to become that kind of a woman—every man's wench?"

Such arguments were indeed hard to resist, and Masua could only offer to let her stay home and wait for his return. But to such a proposal she turned a deaf ear. . . . If he persisted in his stubbornness, she would go with him.

So the ribbon stayed on, but it was more a symbol than anything else.

For the ceremony of handing over the soldiers to the Station Commander Lufari was arrayed in his most gorgeous leopard robes, and a large silver medal hung from his neck. Supporting

## CONGO GODS

himself with his brass-mounted staff, the symbol of his authority, he made a friendly and appropriate speech to which the Commander listened with admirable patience. He had been most agreeably surprised by the alacrity this village had shown in meeting his requisitions and was consequently well disposed toward its chief.

"My lord," Lufari said, "I bring you the six soldiers that you demanded. They are good men, young and strong and brave. One of them," pointing to Masua, "is my son,—he comes voluntarily,—without any compulsion. Do not fetter him. The girl Yaja is his wife and goes with him wherever he goes."

The white Commander smiled pleasantly and turned to Masua.

"So you want to be a soldier, Masua," he said in Basenge dialect.

"Yes, my lord. But I am Lufari's son, and I will not be bound like the others."

"Never fear, Masua, you shall not be. . . . We will make a rattling good Sergeant out of

## MASUA EN ROUTE

you in no time." And so pleased was he with Lufari's volunteers that he increased the usual gift with a whole yard of red cotton and gave Yaja a piece of blue linen so that she might be properly clothed for her long journey. Her entire costume had consisted of a string of glass beads and beautiful fan-shaped tattooing on her belly.

The Commander entered Yaja on the official register as Masua's legal wife, and in the column "incidental remarks" he wrote in red ink that Masua was a real volunteer and was not to be bound. And in his monthly report to the District office he called attention to the notable improvement in the attitude of the natives toward the government, and implied—very subtly, of course—that it was not entirely unrelated to his own wise and firm administration of the post. In due course of time he harvested his meed of praise and recognition, for his superior was a well-meaning and credulous man.

Along toward evening Lufari's "volunteers,"



## CONGO GODS

with a score or more natives from near-by villages, were put aboard the tiny steamer *Bon Voyage* which was to take them down the broad Kasai to the military post at Kwamouth, at the juncture of the Kasai with the Congo. Here they were to await a larger transport which would take them up the Congo to their destination.

"Volunteers," von Meyerbock, the station-chief at Kwamouth, laughed as he looked over this latest batch of frightened and weather-beaten natives. "Volunteers, indeed." And then as he ran his eye down the list, "Hullo, what's this. . . . Masua!"

"Yes, my lord," spoke up the hope of his race with as much courage as he could muster at the moment.

"Is it you who wants to be a soldier?"

"Yes, my lord, it is I."

"Why?"

"I want to learn the white man's *mayele*," replied Masua truthfully.

## MASUA EN ROUTE

"Do you, indeed. . . . Your name shall be Miracle hereafter." And the chief laughed heartily at his wit. "Do you understand? *Comba no jo Masua Mirakel*—your name is Masua Miracle."

"Yes, my lord, I am Masua-Mirak-el," replied Masua meekly, though he understood not at all.

"There is a lad for you," said von Meyerbock to the Captain of the *Bon Voyage*, and in order to show off added, grandiloquently, *Ex Africa semper aliquid novi*, that is, rendered freely, African miracles are black.

He had a reputation for wit, this portly chief of Kwamouth Station, and he was at pains to maintain it. It was a matter of importance to him, a matter of pride, and he indulged it rather more than was necessary. Why so brilliant a man happened to be exiled from the lower Congo and the fleshpots of Boma to the social desert of the upper Congo, and assigned to the dull routine task of trans-shipping and provisioning natives at Kwamouth, is a story in itself. It is

## CONGO GODS

a story that bears certain resemblances to the more famous one of General Uriah's arbitrary transfer to the vanguard of David's army which occasioned such a scandal in Jerusalem a long time ago. But then this is pure gossip. . . . More probably von Meyerbock's transfer to this God-forsaken post on the Kasai had something to do with a deficit in his accounts. . . . A mere advance on his salary, he always maintained. But whatever may be the right and the wrong of this controversy, the affair had permanently embittered him against all womankind. He lived here in Kwamouth a lonely bachelor.

Why, he asked, should he undertake to support a woman—white or black—after his experience with matrimony? And he would spread out his great hands and shrug his shoulders as if to say, "The very suggestion is ridiculous." Why indeed? He had only to send his Boy down to one of the boats that were always coming and going, and have him bring back one of

## MASUA EN ROUTE

the native women. And then, of course, pay the current price for her—three francs, or four empty beer bottles. Usually, he would tell you, he paid in beer bottles. Here in Kwamouth he was like a Sultan—he could have all the liquor he wanted—even the forbidden absinthe (one had only to send a canoe across to the French side of the Congo) and as many women as he cared for. Kwamouth an exile! It was, he would assure you, a veritable paradise.

On this subject of matrimony the excellent von Meyerbock was somewhat daft. The great tree of Kwamouth, he insisted, was his wife. He would gravely introduce the captains of the transports to her. "My wife, Captain," he would say with a flourish. "For, let me tell you, Captain, I have discovered that she is hollow and rotten on the inside. . . . Ha, ha." Rather a queer duck, this Station Chief.

The great tree of Kwamouth was one of the landmarks of the upper Congo. You can see it marked on the maps from Stanley's time, and

## CONGO GODS

indicated on all the river charts before 1905. It was an African teak tree of very considerable dimensions, though its equal might have been found almost anywhere in the depths of the forest. What made this tree seem so remarkable was that it stood free, by itself, on a commanding promontory high above where the black waters of the Kasai mingle with the yellow waters of the Congo. One could see the tree way down from Port XII, and up from Sandy Beach, a distance of over twenty miles, and the natives of the region round about worshiped it as one of the local gods.

It was von Meyerbock who had made the exciting discovery that the great tree was hollow and rotten within. He had peeled off the bark, one day, and dug out the moldered wood until he revealed a hole a spear's length in diameter. It was a sensational discovery, and excited the natives all up and down the river. One of them remembered that Bula-Matadi, the great Stanley, had knocked his pipe against the trunk on

## MASUA EN ROUTE

the identical spot where the hole had been discovered.

A mysterious affair, and just what it meant no one seemed to know. All were agreed that the local gods must be wroth against the white men, but what form their anger would take, or what the natives were to do about it, were questions upon which there was a great variety of opinion, and the witch doctors were even more ambiguous than was their custom. That the white Chief insisted on calling the tree his wife did not simplify matters.

All in all, the natives were agreed, this officer was a most extraordinary white man—quite unlike most of his fellow officers. He was not solemn and formal, like the others, and sometimes—when there were no other whites present—he even joined in the native dances. With the native women he was utterly shameless, and this excited considerable animosity, especially among the men. If he caught sight of some wench who took his fancy—and he was not hard

## CONGO GODS

to please—he would beckon her to him, even in the broad daylight, a thing no decent man would do.

Little Yaja's chocolate-brown beauty had not escaped von Meyerbock's practiced eye while he was looking over the new batch of soldiers, and along toward evening he sent his Boy down to the *Bon Voyage* to fetch her to him.

It was some time before the Boy returned, and when he finally came he was alone. He told his master somewhat incoherently how the little Basenge girl had refused to go with him and how, when he attempted to take her by force, her man had rained blows on him and driven him off the ship. That recruit was an insubordinate fellow, the Boy insisted, and he ought to be taught his place. . . . The Chief, who had already retired to his bed, swore lustily and ordered the Boy to call the corporal.

At that very moment the corporal burst into the room and announced in an excited voice that the Great Tree was afire.

## MASUA EN ROUTE

Hastily von Meyerbock pulled on his trousers and hurried out to the veranda where a sight at once wonderful and terrible met his eye. In some way or other a spark from one of the steamers must have found its way into the hole in the tree and ignited the whole rotten moldering trunk. Now the inside of the tree was burning like a mighty furnace. From his veranda von Meyerbock could hear the crackling and roaring of the flames within the tree, and far up near the top of the trunk a cloud of black smoke belched forth into the night and a great geyser of sparks flooded the land or fell into the waters with an unpleasant hissing sound. Forgetting all about his intentions with Yaja he reëntered his room, flung on the rest of his clothes, and hurried down to the scene of the fire.

There is something of the pyromaniac and something of the fire-worshiper in most of us, and von Meyerbock was no exception. He was fascinated by the burning pillar. Along the whole length of the trunk a glowing strip of fire



## CONGO GODS

licked its way to the top which spouted forth smoke and sparks. The heat round about was unbearable, and none could approach within a hundred feet of this curious tree-oven. The Chief took up a position as close as was comfortable and settled back in his camp chair to enjoy the splendid exhibition. He wagered with himself that the tree would fall before midnight, the stake being a bottle of whisky which he took in advance.

By midnight the chimney hole at the top of the tree had become considerably larger and a blue-white tongue of flame several yards long licked out of it, serpent-like, while the furnace within the tree roared a veritable hell. But the tree still stood. Von Meyerbock made a new wager with himself, this time that the tree would stand until morning.

The gigantic torch which so miraculously burned night into day attracted all the natives for miles around, and these, together with the people of Kwamouth Station and the passengers

## MASUA EN ROUTE

awaiting transportation, gathered in a great semicircle at a respectful distance. Some chattered and gesticulated excitedly like so many monkeys, but the majority, heavy with foreboding, stared silently at their burning tree-god.

Little Yaja was terribly frightened at it all, and clung desperately to Masua. He stood silent and calm as befitted a chieftain's son, his brow furrowed in thought, his fists still clenched in anger after his encounter with the white chief's Boy. He had never taken much stock in these tree gods, and now he wanted to watch this one closely. Many years ago he had defied the gods who were supposed to reside in the three bread-fruit trees back home, and found them impotent. In a spirit of bravado he had hurled his spear among the branches of all three of them in turn, and far from suffering for his temerity, he had the singular good fortune to bring down a hippopotamus single-handed the very next day.

However, Masua was open-minded, and he

## CONGO GODS

felt that here was a further opportunity to discover whether these forest gods really amounted to anything or not. If the great tree at Kwamouth housed a powerful Forest God, as all the natives round about averred, it would have to show itself now or never. It would have to escape from that roaring caldron and then, if he watched closely, he could see what it looked like. Perhaps he could even stop it and ask its advice about his plans. . . . It was all very exciting, in any event, and in his excitement Masua, like von Meyerbock, forgot his anger.

This white man, now, introduced an element of uncertainty. Masua was accustomed to respect the superior intelligence of the whites, and to bow to it. Indeed, it was the contempt which the white men in Italemba had shown for Mozuri and his Gods that led to Masua's spiritual emancipation. But this white man was different. . . . One might think that he, too, believed in the Spirit who resided in the great tree, and worshiped it. His conduct was in-

## MASUA EN ROUTE

deed singular. There he sat all night through, with his bottle of whisky beside him, drinking toast after toast to the burning tree, talking and gibbering at it like one possessed.

He called it Babette,—a curious name for so magnificent a tree, one must admit, and he addressed it in terms of endearment, of entreaty and of anger. He scolded and he wept, and all the time the whisky burned in his brain as the fire burned in the hollow, rotten trunk of the tree.

“That’s the way it feels to burn in Hell, you little wench. It will burn all the rottenness out of you. . . . Lord, what nonsense I spout! The rottenness is all burned out long ago. . . . Lord help us, I’m the one who is rotten on the inside. . . . Your health, Babette. God, but you were a lovely thing in your bridal dress. . . .”

When the sun rose a single branch far down on the trunk had fallen to the ground, but otherwise the great tree was still intact, and it looked

## CONGO GODS

as if it might last a good while yet. Von Meyerbock roused himself and went about his duties. He called the roll of the Station and sent all the blacks about their business. Then he partook of a light breakfast consisting of whisky and soda and bananas, and when the steamer *Princess Clementine* from Irebu docked at the wharf about nine in the morning, he took care of the usual business without any apparent difficulty. Captain Sorel of the *Princess Clementine* remarked later on his extreme reticence, but otherwise he noticed nothing unusual about him. The boat lay by for an hour that the passengers might enjoy the splendid spectacle; cameras were brought forth and numerous snapshots taken; and these inevitable ceremonies having been duly observed the whistle blew and the ship steamed on down the Congo to Leopoldville—and civilization.

Along toward evening von Meyerbock once more took up his position on a camp chair in front of the burning "Babette," with a fresh

## MASUA EN ROUTE

bottle of whisky. The natives had by this time wearied of watching the fiery torch, and the few blacks who lingered on earlier in the evening had quite disappeared by midnight. Only the Chief's Boy remained with him, and a single sentry who was always on duty at night.

It was these two, together with Masua and a couple of hastily summoned natives, who, just after midnight, forcibly prevented von Meyerbock from hurling himself into the fiery furnace of the tree.

The hole near the ground had by now burned large enough to admit a man, and it was into this that the whisky-crazed chief had tried to throw himself, shouting that he wanted to get into Babette.

They carried him, protesting and struggling frantically, up to his house and laid him on the bed, and by dawn, when the huge trunk finally snapped in two with a terrific crash and went hurtling into the river, he was dead.

As for Masua, he was unable to decide

## CONGO GODS

whether there was a spirit in the tree or not, after all. For oddly enough, Yaja and many of the others had either glimpsed or felt one rush by them just as the tree toppled to earth. But he had been so busy peeking into the house to see how a white man looked when he was dead that he had missed the tree god. For once in his life he was too slow on the turn.

## CHAPTER V

### LUCIEN EN ROUTE

ONCE abroad the great ocean liner *Leopold II*, and well away from the shores of Belgium, Lucien was reasonably happy. He was inundated with new impressions, overwhelmed by new experiences. The busy, well-regulated life aboard the steamer, the limitless expanse of ocean, wonderful beyond his wildest dreams (who would have thought there could be so much water, he said to himself), the picturesque foreign ports with the strange names: Teneriffe, Dakar, Sierra Leone, St. Thomée—all so different from the Boulevard d'Anspach or Rue de l'Etude in Brussels—all of this took his mind off his own sorrows and, for the time at least, off Marietta Fromont and her faithlessness.



## CONGO GODS

But in the long run they weren't enough. The sedative effect of novelty gradually wore off and Lucien succumbed to the pangs of homesickness. Perhaps the worst part of his suffering was the fact that he had no privacy in which to enjoy his sorrow. He was only a non-com of the second class, and consequently had to share his cabin with three others of the same lowly standing. When homesickness and longing for Marietta and self-pity got their claws into him there was literally no place for him to go with his grief except the bathroom. There he could weep unseen to his heart's content.

At first it had been rather fun to sit in a corner of the smoking salon and listen to the talk of the Congo-veterans, to the tall tales of adventure and the petty gossip of officialdom. But after a time even this palled on him. And it was painful for him to learn what small fry he and his fellow non-coms were.

*Messieurs les Officiers* traveled first class,

## LUCIEN EN ROUTE

dressed for dinner, chose among a fantastic number of courses of food, drank fine wines and liqueurs, and treated all non-coms as so much thin air. This, after all, was not so unreasonable, nor was it unbearable, but it was decidedly annoying that even the second-class officers, who for the most part had been out to the Congo but once before, should treat them in the same contemptuous fashion. These drew on their tropical manner with their tropical clothes, and part of that manner was an open and frank disdain of all greenhorns.

One can hardly blame them. They remembered with painful distinctness what downright pitiable objects they had been when they first went out to the Congo. When they contrasted this with their present maturity and dignity, they were filled with a consciousness of their station, and determined to impress it on the new batch of greenhorns.

Even the stewards were arrogant and impudent, for they knew from long experience that

## CONGO GODS

there was not much to expect in the way of tips from these underpaid new-comers.

Between officers, veterans of one year and shameless stewards, poor Lucien had a hard time of it. Indeed, he was but little better off than one of the bewildered black "volunteers" of Masua's group who were at that very moment steaming down the Kasai on a puffing little river monster. These poor devils clung to Masua with a pathetic confidence, while Masua tried with all his might to keep a stiff upper lip. Little Lucien, on the *Leopold II*, attached himself humbly to whoever would tolerate him for the time being.

His feelings were easily hurt, Lucien's. A sour look, a curt answer, an impatience with his obvious unhappiness were enough to send him scurrying off to himself. The Congo civil servants and military officers were all too ready to be impatient with a tenderfoot. They were a hard lot; Lucien thought that they were terribly vulgar and crude, but he was unjust to them. They

## LUCIEN EN ROUTE

had gone through a mighty ordeal, out there in the Congo, and those who survived bore the marks of the struggle. They lived in a different world from that of Lucien, and they made no attempt to understand his. But they meant him no ill.

Lucien had always been a poor thing. It remained to be seen whether Africa could make a man out of him. Had any one put this question to his shipmates, they would probably have answered that the chances were small.

Africa was a harsh mistress. She put her victims through a veritable purgatory, visited upon them physical and spiritual misery, fever, malaria, sleeping sickness, and a boredom often approaching insanity. If they survived this treatment, they were likely to come out with something of the cruelty and something of the strength of Africa in their souls. If they couldn't stand it, why, well and good,—there was plenty of room in Africa for more graves.

Africa had broken better men than Lucien.

## CONGO GODS

In spite of his propensity for brooding there were occasions on shipboard when Lucien forgot his woes and positively enjoyed himself. He lived pretty much on the surface, and was almost as quickly moved to laughter as to tears. The initiation of the new members of the Congo Civil Service was a particularly pleasant experience, and one that he liked to recall later on. It was on this occasion, when the first and second classes fraternized and the officers hobnobbed with the non-coms, that Lucien met Colonel Bangsbo.

Lucien thought Bangsbo by far the handsomest man he had ever laid eyes on. He had long admired the famous soldier from afar, and those occasions when Bangsbo descended to the second-class smoking room to gossip with old Larsen, the machinist, and Lucien saw him at close range, merely increased the boy's admiration. . . . Tall and straight, with powerful broad shoulders and slender hips, fair-haired and blue-eyed, he was in reality the same type as

## LUCIEN EN ROUTE

Marietta's betrayer, but, thought Lucien, much finer. Lucien cudgeled his brains for an appropriate name to apply to his hero, and at last hit on one which he thought a brilliant inspiration—"Apollo." Just who Apollo actually was, he had only the vaguest idea, but the word sounded well and confirmed to some inner ideal which he harboured, and he repeated it over and over to himself. "Apollo, a true Apollo."

The name was appropriate enough, though Adonis might have been better, if one had to go to the Greeks for a name for this blond Viking. Bangsbo's feminine admirers usually borrowed some term from the vocabulary of the moving pictures to apply to him. And he was masculine enough to find it all rather a bore.

On the occasion of the initiation ball, which was held in the smoking room of the first class, Lucien took refuge with old Larsen, the Norwegian machinist, who was sitting in a corner quietly sipping a liqueur when Lucien entered. Larsen greeted him with a friendly nod, but paid

## CONGO GODS

no particular attention to him, and he sat overcome with the extravagance of polished black walnut and gilt-framed mirrors and a little depressed by a sentimental song which Inspector Brunoir's wife was rendering. All about the room he heard the corks of champagne bottles pop, and after he had finished his liqueur, Larsen ordered a bottle of Burgundy, which he generously shared with Lucien. He himself used the sweet effervescent wine as a soda water for his whisky, but that, as he remarked when he filled Lucien's glass, was no drink for children.

Lucien sipped his Burgundy with something akin to reverence. It was the first time in his life that he had ever tasted real wine, with the exception of a bottle of port that Holmsteen had ordered once. His gratitude was so sincere that Larsen was embarrassed.

It was at this moment that Colonel Bangsbo entered the salon and, disregarding the invitations from the Inspector's table where sat the

## LUCIEN EN ROUTE

three ladies of the boat, walked across the room and dropped into the space between Larsen and Lucien.

He took a whisky straight and drank a health to both of them.

"Nothing of the swelled head about him," Lucien said to himself in grateful admiration as he emptied his glass.

A moment later Inspector Brunoir arose and proposed a toast to the "Hero of Kamambendi." "Make it a 'cavalry charge,'" cried a short, black-bearded Serbian officer—a late regicide—and the suggestion was greeted with shouts of approval. At a signal from him all began to tap on the tables or the arms of their chairs first with one finger, then with two, then to pound with their fists and stamp with their feet until finally the toast ended in a grand uproar of pounding and stamping, and hurrahs.

Lucien had never witnessed a cavalry charge, but he had no doubt that it sounded much like this when thousands of horses' hoofs came clat-



## CONGO GODS

tering, first from afar, then nearer and nearer, until they rushed by in a thunderous hurricane of sound. He could almost see the cavalry tearing by, the manes of the horses streaming in the wind, the gallant riders bending forward on their mounts, the bright standards rushing aloft into battle. . . . He was fired with enthusiasm and pounded and stamped along with the others until the last sound died away.

Not until then did it dawn on Lucien that the man who was the object of all this homage, the "Hero of Kamambendi," was none other than Bangsbo,—Colonel Bangsbo who had just drunk his health. He was deeply moved. His glass had been filled again, so he now raised it toward Bangsbo and stammered, "Your health, *Mon Commandant*." There were tears in his eyes, and Colonel Bangsbo nodded to him and smiled.

Yes, indeed, it was a never-to-be-forgotten evening.

Lufari's slaves enjoyed a similar experience when, just before they were delivered over to

## LUCIEN EN ROUTE

the whites they were allowed to dance the dance of Manhood with the free men of the tribe and the chieftain's son, Masua.

At Boma Lucien was given a routing to far-off Basoko on the upper reaches of the Congo. He steamed up the river a few miles to Matadi where, along with all the others who were bound for the interior, he boarded a rickety old train that puffed its way toilsomely through a desolate country of sun-baked plains and little hillocks tufted with tall buff-colored grass to Leopoldville. Here he and his baggage were dumped out without much ceremony, and transferred to a little steamer shaped like a flatiron, the *Deliverance VI*, an old tub which had long ago seen its best days, and which was so loaded down with provisions that its narrow deck stood but a few inches above the surface of the water. Lucien shuddered as he looked at it. The deck was alive with negroes, squatting in what space there was between the confused litter of boxes,

## CONGO GODS

chests, mosquito nets, jars of olive oil and bags of salt.

The *Deliverance VI* was, strictly speaking, no longer used as a passenger boat. It had some time ago been turned into a transport, and was used regularly to carry natives to the military posts along the river. That Lucien had to take passage on it was one of the misfortunes attendant upon his lowly rank, for all of the accommodations of the new passenger boat, the *Flanders*, had been filled by the newly arrived officials. Since some one had to endure the discomforts of the *Deliverance VI* the choice naturally fell on Lucien as the youngest and the most insignificant of the new arrivals. He was the only passenger aboard the dingy little steamer and his feeling of loneliness at the prospect before him was almost as great as his disappointment that he was to be separated from his hero, Colonel Bangsbo.

The Finnish machinist who welcomed Lucien aboard couldn't understand a word the

## LUCIEN EN ROUTE

lad said, but Lucien was able to make out from the machinist's jargon of French and Flemish and his voluble gestures that the Captain of the *Deliverance VI* had died that morning and that the boat would be laid up at Leopoldville until another Captain could be found.

"*Tiens, tiens*, this is the Congo," Lucien said to himself. "To-day alive, to-morrow dead."

"Was it malaria?" he asked sympathetically.

"Non,—black-water fever,—*Heamaturie*. You will probably know all about it in time." The friendly machinist gave some of the more lurid details, and Lucien felt himself becoming sick, and hastily excused himself.

"To-morrow they have the funeral," M. Riepinen said in parting. "If our new Captain shows up before then, we escape it. . . . If you want anything. . . ."

Lucien was duly installed in a comparatively large cabin on the lower deck. It was simply, almost sparsely furnished, but it was clean, and, above all, it gave him the first privacy which he

## CONGO GODS

had enjoyed since he left Belgium. As much privacy, in any event, as was possible when four thin board walls and windows of copper mosquito netting were all that separated him from the crowd of cackling negroes on the deck.

They looked very ferocious and forbidding, these negroes with their fantastically tattooed skins and their great black eyes that stared out at one from faces cruelly deformed. They stared at him, at his fair skin and his dirty wrinkled khaki clothes, and the first stoker, a huge, heavy-limbed, surly fellow with a face so disfigured by mutilations that he looked like the Devil himself, made some witticism that provoked uproarious amusement.

"*Basenge na n'Putu*," he said, which, idiomatically translated, would be "A wild man from Europe."

Lucien couldn't understand the words, of course, but he heard the laughter and saw the evil, grinning faces with their eyes squinting over in his direction and he felt uncomfortable and

## LUCIEN EN ROUTE

slightly ridiculous, as one does when exposed to the laughter of children. Had he been a little more experienced in the ways of the Congo he would have sauntered over to the clever stoker and quite casually given him a crack on the ear. It might have cost him ten francs,—though that is extremely doubtful,—but it would have insured him respect and obedience for the rest of the trip.

But this, of course, he didn't know, so he merely blushed and looked away.

M. Riepinen, however, had overheard his assistant's witticism, and though he couldn't suppress his own smile he realized that it wouldn't do to permit such liberties among the blacks. He emerged from his cabin, therefore, and with a few well-directed kicks put an end to the jollity on deck. . . . Lars Riepinen had been in the Congo too long to risk his knuckles on the tough skulls or the sharp filed teeth of the negroes, and long practice had given him an extraordinary skill with his feet. Lucien, who

## CONGO GODS

was rather bewildered at it all, felt somewhat shocked at the Finn's brutality, but he felt comforted, too.

Later on in the day Riepinen sent his Boy to help Lucien get established and to fasten up the new copper mosquito netting. It was a friendly gesture, and little Lucien, who had not felt much friendliness since he left his home in Malines, appreciated it and was grateful. He made overtures to the machinist and found him friendly, but difficulties of language effectually prevented much conversation between them. Privately Lucien thought that Riepinen looked almost as unprepossessing as the negroes, with his worn and emaciated face, his dull gray eyes, and his bristly, unkempt mustache.

The first night aboard the *Deliverance VI*, inside the four walls of thin gauze which seemed somehow to screen him off from the hostile atmosphere of the ship, the little white lad cried himself to sleep. But he was not even allowed to enjoy his first night without interruption.

## LUCIEN EN ROUTE

Along toward morning he was rudely awakened by the machinist returning from his farewell visit to the bar in Leopoldville, bawling strange, ribald songs in a voice that hit all the wrong notes. He tumbled aboard with a terrific commotion, arousing the sleeping blacks and precipitating a series of angry imprecations. Lucien was scared almost out of his wits. Riepinen soon fell into a drunken stupor, but not until hours after his thunderous snoring had brought peace, if not quiet, to the ship was Lucien able to fall into a fitful slumber.

The very next day a new Captain came aboard. He was none other than Captain Hartley, the senior officer of the Congo marine.

As a matter of fact, Hartley had finished his term of service and was on his way home to Europe for a brief vacation. Furthermore, such a command as the tiny *Deliverance VI* was quite beneath his dignity. Nevertheless he magnanimously consented to fill the breach left by the unfortunate demise of poor Captain Petersen



## CONGO GODS

“from Svendborg” and take the boat up the river until it met SS. *Hainault*, whose pilot could then take over the command.

Early in the morning Hartley’s servants came aboard with his baggage and his bathtub, and when the word got about that this was none other than the great “Artley” coming, excitement pervaded the natives, and Riepinen—who despite his debauch of the night before was up betimes—and his assistants busied themselves with “smarting” the ship up for the Captain’s reception.

Hartley’s cook at once took charge of the kitchen and reduced the ship’s own cook to the position of scullery boy, and up on the bridge Hartley’s Boys ordered the others around in loud tones, while they saw to it that the Captain’s cabin was made ready for their master.

Along toward noon a black woman came aboard with her retinue,—a truly splendid creature. She was Captain Hartley’s *menagère*, Fania, and Lucien’s classification of her as a

## LUCIEN EN ROUTE

*madame noir*—a black lady—was not far amiss. Had her skin been fair instead of black no one would have dreamed of applying to her any other word but “lady.” She was a full-grown negress, strikingly beautiful, plump and full-bosomed. Her clothing consisted of a cloak of dark blue velvet, gathered around her hips by a maroon-colored silk scarf. With the aid of a silver ribbon and innumerable hairpins she had fastened her curly black hair into a magnificent coiffure, and over her she held, with crushing dignity, a red silk parasol. The whole effect was quite regal.

At her heels trotted a little black girl who carried, with an air of reverence, a “music-box”—a harmonica with shining silver corners and bells. Behind her stalked five black sailors from the *Flanders* bearing my lady’s traveling necessities, three huge trunks, some caskets of delicacies, a deck chair and other luggage.

All of this splendor in addition to her voluptuous beauty quite took Lucien’s breath away,

## CONGO GODS

and he committed the unpardonable social error of doffing his hat to her. Fortunately no other white man observed this blunder, and it brought only broad grins from the blacks and a coquet-tish smile from Fania, who was by no means insensible to such spontaneous flattery.

It was not until several hours later that Captain Hartley, who had been going through the ship's papers at the business office, came aboard. He exchanged a few words with Riepinen and, without deigning the least notice of the others on board, white or black, mounted the bridge. A moment later Lucien was startled by a shrill, piercing blast from the steam whistle. The telegraph gong clanged "Brrrrrr" and the iron deck began to vibrate from stem to stern. Steam hissed from the stop-cocks and the ventilators, heavy furnace doors slammed shut, and the great paddle wheel churned the muddy water to boiling. The whole ship became a living, quivering thing. Snorting, it backed away from the shore. "Pfut" went the whistle, and a slim young negro

## LUCIEN EN ROUTE

loosed his grip on a rope which had fastened the ship to the bank, hurled it onto the deck, waded out into the water and with a few powerful strokes reached the prow of the boat and pulled himself aboard. The boat swung slowly around until its prow pointed up-stream. The reverse motion of the paddle wheel was changed into a forward stroke, and the *Deliverance VI* steamed grandly up the Congo, carrying as its sole passenger little Lucien Dubois of Malines.

Perhaps the senior officer of the Congo marine was overconfident, or perhaps he underestimated the difficulty of navigating so tiny a ship as the *Deliverance VI*; in any event, he nearly came to grief in the dangerous whirlpool at Calina Point. (The place took its name from an Austrian officer, Captain Calina, who lost his life there some years earlier.) Captain Hartley was doubtless so accustomed to negotiate the point with one of the great new steamers, the *Kitamo* or the *Flanders*, that he had entirely forgotten how the

## CONGO GODS

mighty Congo can toy with a small, heavily overloaded ship like the *Deliverance VI*. He signaled for full steam ahead and ran straight into the heaviest current off the Point, with the result that he came within a hair's-breadth of sending the boat and all its precious cargo to the bottom:—forty negroes and a Finnish machinist, Fania and all her splendor, Lucien and his career, and himself and his reputation.

As the hull of the boat was sucked into the whirlpool two walls of yellowish water shot up over the bow, hung in the air for the fraction of a second, then cascaded over the deck, flooding the hatches and washing over the coaming. One might think that the *Deliverance VI* had taken a notion to be a submarine.

A shrill whistle and the paddle came to a sudden stop. The boat swung drunkenly from side to side while the water flowed off the deck. After a moment the machinery was set in motion again, people picked themselves up in a more or less bedraggled state and collected their

## LUCIEN EN ROUTE

wits and their scattered belongings. The boat seemed to get its wind again, the cylinder cocks began to blow, the engine picked up full steam and the paddle resumed its interrupted work. Captain Hartley, with a hasty glance around, noted that no damage had been done.

The first impact of the whirlpool sent Lucien sprawling from his deck chair to the deck. He staggered to his feet and grasped what was nearest at hand—as it happened, the lovely Fania. Now he recovered from his momentary daze and loosed his grip, vaguely aware of a not unpleasant sensation. Fania laughed coquettishly at him, for quite well she knew that she was—well—tempting, and the little white boy's obvious embarrassment amused her.

Lucien, who was quite without experience in sailing, knew vaguely that something unusual had happened to the ship, but the whole episode was so sudden and so brief that he had not had time to become seriously alarmed. How near they all had been to a quick and fatal plunge

## CONGO GODS

below the yellow waters of the Congo few outside of Captain Hartley himself, the machinist, and perhaps a couple of the blacks realized. . . . The Captain took a few deep breaths and poured himself a whisky and soda, and Riepinen drank an extra bottle of beer. The Congo, grandfather of waters, had merely given the little steamer a playful tap with its mighty paw to remind it, and all of its passengers, of their insignificance and their impotence.

In the days following the incident at Calina Point, Lucien's spirits, already low, fell to a point dangerously near zero.

The *Deliverance VI* was navigating that stretch of the Congo called, because of a faint resemblance to the waters between England and France, the Channel. First, one can discern, on the French side of the river, a series of long, low cliffs that have been named the "Cliffs of Dover." After these are passed there comes an interminable stretch of low, densely wooded

## LUCIEN EN ROUTE

banks, imposing because of the unbroken black savage front they present. When an inland monsoon whipped the waters of the Congo into fury, the little tempest-tossed *Deliverance VI* seemed but a microscopic speck bobbing up and down on a muddy yellow path between two endless black forests.

Lucien, poor soul, had never entertained any exaggerated idea of his own importance, but never had he experienced anything like the sensation of utter insignificance and impotence that gradually permeated him and paralyzed him as the *Deliverance VI* slowly splashed its way through the "Channel" and into the heart of the jungle.

He was utterly alone in the world, and that loneliness which is meat and wine for stronger spirits was spiritual starvation for him. His was an essentially gregarious nature. The Captain, arrayed in immaculate white, sat unapproachable on the bridge and ignored him completely. The machinist, the only other white man, put-



## CONGO GODS

tered around his engine room and, except for a few minutes twice a day when he shared a bottle of beer and said *Santé*, ignored him quite as completely as the Captain did.

All day long Lucien sat motionless in his deck chair and stared dully at the dark, unchanging shores and the muddy yellow water, while the scorching African sun beat mercilessly down on the boat and the engine shook it with maddening regularity. Three times a day he nibbled at the food that was placed before him by a silent, hostile negro, but he had no appetite and could not taste what he ate. . . . He had long ago given up trying to read, and the crew, all of whom looked alike to his unpracticed eyes, soon ceased to interest him. The alluring Fania, she of the hospitable bosom and the coquettish smile, lost her charm for him,—which was just as well, for as the Captain's mistress she couldn't very well have an affair with him, anyway. . . . Even Marietta Fromont began to seem curiously distant and unreal.

## LUCIEN EN ROUTE

It was in the evening, when the sun—a great red ball of fire, frightful and hostile and altogether different from the kindly sun which he knew back home in Belgium—sank behind the desolate hills, when the bright glare of day gave way to the barbaric blackness of an African night, when the sweltering heat changed into a damp, chilling cold,—it was then that little Lucien suffered most, then that he was overcome with the loneliness and the unfriendliness of it all and the tears welled up in his eyes and blinded him. It was then that he longed desperately for his mamma and Marietta and the homely security of Malines and Brussels and the Tietz Brothers Department Store, and all that friendly world which seemed so incredibly distant to him. Miserable and cold and lonely he would crawl under his mosquito netting and cry himself to sleep, or perhaps lie and stare vacantly and hopelessly at the ghostly white panels of his tiny room until he dropped off into a fitful slumber.

After all, he was nothing but a child.



## CHAPTER VI

### LUCIEN MEETS YAJA

THE death of von Meyerbock held Masua and his little group from the upper Kasai at Kwamouth for over a week awaiting the arrival of a new Station commander. He finally came, on the *Flanders*, and a few days later the *Deliverance VI* splashed into the Station and stopped long enough to take Masua and his brethren aboard. They filed onto the deck, each man with a small package of food, and Masua leading Yaja by the ribbon tied lightly around her neck.

It had been a hard week for him. Von Meyerbock's death had demoralized the Station, the food had not been good, and Yaja, that little pearl, Yaja, must not go hungry. But Masua's eyes were still defiant and his head erect as he came aboard the boat that was to carry him to

## CONGO GODS

the military camp at Bumba,—to introduce him to the white *mayele*. The tense little frown between his eyes which had been there since he was a boy and had always given a thoughtful look to his face, was more pronounced than ever.

Masua watched everything aboard ship with the liveliest curiosity: the great dull-gleaming engine that seemed to be worked by some unseen power; the huge paddle wheel that churned up the muddy waters and sent the spray flying into his too inquisitive face; the Captain, attired always in immaculate white, aloof on the bridge; and the little white man who sat so disconsolately staring across the water at the opposite shore.

Masua was not the only one of the natives who noticed Lucien and whose curiosity was aroused by the obvious dejection of the little fellow. He was the subject of considerable discussion among them, discussion which turned mainly on the question of how long he might be expected to live. When a black man falls into melancholia, he ordinarily dies very quickly, but

## LUCIEN MEETS YAJA

white men, in this as in so many other respects, are capricious.

It was exquisitely amusing to be able to jeer at Lucien in his very presence, for the little fool couldn't understand a word of what was said. . . . As long as one didn't stare at him too boldly.

To Masua, Lucien was a revelation and a most encouraging one. All white men, then, were not strong and masterful characters like the officers at Italemba, or *Mayele Mango*—Captain Hartley, or even the Chief at Kwamouth. . . . To be sure, the latter had been sick in his head, and perhaps the spirit of the great tree of Kwamouth had cast a spell over him, but he had been strong and powerful for all that. But this little white boy. . . . Surely, thought Masua, there must be others like him among the whites, puny and dispirited men with water in their veins instead of blood, weak-kneed and white-livered. As Masua pondered this startling fact his vast plans that seemed at

## CONGO GODS

times so infinitely distant and fantastic began to assume a certain reality and to seem possible of realization.

Masua had made the discovery that there were white men and white men. That was no small discovery for a Kasai bushman to make in three brief weeks. Some white men live in Africa most of their lives without realizing that there are negroes and negroes.

Masua and his countrymen had not been aboard the *Deliverance VI* more than a week before they had a singular stroke of luck. Fania, who was something of a Queen when she deigned to descend to the lower deck, recognized them as countrymen.

Incredible as it sounds, it turned out that Fania, the elegant Fania, whose toilette was like that of a white lady, actually came into this world as a naked baby in one of Lufari's grass huts on the banks of the Kasai. She was, as a matter of fact, Yaja's aunt.

## LUCIEN MEETS YAJA

As a consequence she took them all, and especially Yaja and Masua, under her special protection, and her protection was something not to be lightly valued. It manifested itself not only in the food she managed to smuggle down to them—smoked fish and olive oil and other delicacies, but in the complete security from the impudent attentions of the other blacks that she gave to Yaja.

And now that he was a protégé of the powerful Fania, Capita, Riepinen's assistant, truckled to Masua, permitted him to poke his nose into everything that interested him and even to try his hand at stoking the boilers and oiling the engine. Masua was anxious to find out whether black men alone could manage the engine and man the ship; whether, in short, the whites were indispensable. Capita assured him that he and the native helmsmen were fully competent to manage the boat by themselves. Duly discounting Capita's propensity for boasting and exaggeration, Masua concluded that the *mayele*



## CONGO GODS

of the white men was accessible to black men as well, and in his mind's eye he saw himself at the prow of a fire-boat such as this, manned entirely by black men and filled with armed warriors. . . .

Day after day the *Deliverance VI* splashed its way up the river.

On the bridge sat Captain Hartley smoking and reading, always cool and white, and in the machine room sat Riepinen, puffing a corncob pipe, but reading very little and drinking his five glasses of beer a day with clock-like regularity. Regularly twice a day Lucien shared a bottle with him, and they said *Chinchin* and *Santé* to each other, the first when they touched glasses, the second when their glasses were empty.

And then Lucien invariably added a polite *Merci*, but further than that the conversation never got.

Riepinen wouldn't have the lad hanging around the engine room for anything. There were limits to his hospitality, and he preferred

## LUCIEN MEETS YAJA

his own thoughts and day dreams, whatever they may have been, to Lucien's mournful mien.

Madame Fania bathed twice daily and made her three hour toilette every afternoon.

And Lucien's spirits fell lower and lower.

A fast, modern boat like the *Kitamo* or the *Flanders* can make the stretch between Leopoldville and Basoko in a little under three weeks, but a little tub like the *Deliverance VI* takes almost a month for the trip. This time it took over a month, for the *Flanders* which had preceded it upstream had used up almost all the firewood that had been accumulated along the way, and the *Deliverance VI* had to stop every few days and cut its own. And just beyond Bumba a submerged tree ripped off part of the paddle wheel and they were held up for two days before the damage could be repaired. All in all the trip took five weeks instead of three, and before half that time had elapsed, the days began to slip imperceptibly into each other and

## CONGO GODS

time itself came to be meaningless. Lucien felt as if he had been sailing up this river since the beginning of time. The monotony and the stifling heat reduced him to a state of complete mental and physical inertia. He suffered from constipation and ran a high temperature; his ears sang from all the quinine that he poured into himself; his knees felt curiously slack and his legs had lost all their strength. He could scarcely drag himself from his deck chair to the engine room or to his cabin.

"This is the Congo," he thought. "I am lost. Now I will die out in this God-forsaken place, and never again see Marietta." For a moment he would be overcome with self-pity as he contemplated his tragic fate; then he would resign himself to it and fall into a dull stupor.

It was not until they reached n'Dobo that something occurred to break the monotony of the trip.

Late in the afternoon of one particularly sultry

## LUCIEN MEETS YAJA

day a tropical thunderstorm arose, accompanied by a tempestuous gale that churned the waters of the river until it looked like a miniature ocean. Masua was lying beside a pile of firewood in the stern of the boat when the storm arose, and as he scrambled around the wood pile to get to shelter he dislodged it. The wood slid down over him, and stunned by a blow on the head and another in the solar plexus he loosed his grip, tumbled overboard, and disappeared beneath the yellow waters.

Captain Hartley brought the boat around as speedily as possible under the circumstances, and searched for Masua for the best part of an hour. But when darkness fell he gave up the search as futile, sounded full steam ahead, and wrote in the ship's log opposite Masua's name, "Killed in an accident" and the date. Little did he realize that he was penning the epitaph of the Liberator of Africa.

Poor Yaja made a half-hearted attempt to leap in the water after her husband, as native

## CONGO GODS

etiquette demands of a bereaved wife, but she was prevented from this folly by her aunt Fania. Failing this she wept uninterruptedly for twelve hours and mourned for twenty-four,—which must be regarded as exceptionally dutiful and respectful in a bride so young.

The person upon whom the accident made the deepest impression, when you come right down to it, was probably Lucien.

Never before had he witnessed the death of a fellow man, or been so close to stark tragedy. Masua's drowning, Yaja's attempted suicide and her subsequent mournful wailing, made a profound impression upon his sensitive soul. It all shook him out of his stupor, and raised him to a pitch of excitement and nervousness that verged upon the hysterical.

He felt that if he couldn't find some support now, some understanding, some sympathy, he would go to pieces. He was at the end of his tether.

It was in this condition bordering upon des-

## LUCIEN MEETS YAJA

peration that he ventured up on the Captain's bridge. He had been on the point of going up to it a couple of times but his shyness and his innate respect for authority had restrained him. Well might a little clerk from Malines hesitate to intrude upon the sacrosanct privacy of the Captain's bridge. And old Hartley, with his great bushy eyebrows and his fierce mustache, looked like a Field Marshal or an Admiral.

But now disregarding the "No admittance" sign, Lucien stumbled up the iron stairs and appeared on the bridge, a scared, white, miserable figure.

Not without reason was Hartley called by the natives *Mayele Mungo*—Heavenly Wisdom. He was, in truth, almost as wise as the blacks thought him to be, particularly in all that concerned the Congo and its ways. As soon as he saw Lucien he realized what was the matter with the lad.

"What the devil are they thinking about back in Brussels, sending such a babe-in-arms out

## CONGO GODS

here. Now I suppose I'll have to act as a nurse and listen to his babbling from morning to night," he thought. But outwardly he smiled pleasantly, invited his guest to take a seat, and went into the cabin to mix a whisky and soda.

He was out again in a moment, filled Lucien's glass and gravely drank his health.

"You're not looking very well," he said. "Having a touch of malaria?"

And Lucien, poor boy, was so overcome by the great man's solicitude that he could scarcely speak.

But once he was well started, he talked a blue streak. Heavens above, how he talked! He turned himself inside out for Hartley's inspection, told about his mamma and his sisters, about his life in Malines and in Brussels, and detailed every aspect of his career as a clerk in Tietz Brothers. . . .

"Perhaps M. le Capitaine knows Tietz Brothers Department Store,—Grand Bazar d'Anspach on the Boulevard?"

## LUCIEN MEETS YAJA

Yes, M. le Capitaine knew the place. Indeed he had occasionally shopped there.

"Well, well, think of that. Could it be possible, then, that I might have had the honor of waiting on M. le Capitaine. . . ." Lucien was quite overcome at the thought. He felt sure that he remembered the Captain's face, but, of course, he hadn't at the time the remotest idea . . . etc., etc.

Hartley's friendly, almost professional manner became somewhat strained under the impact of such twaddle.

Fortunately Lucien's monologue was cut short by the announcement of lunch, so Captain Hartley never knew what the little fellow would have done had he actually known to whom he had the singular honor of selling three sets of collar buttons. . . . Wrapped them in tin-foil, probably! The little ninny!

After lunch Lucien regaled his weary host with stories of his love affairs. He drew upon his imagination, retold, in garbled form, stories



## CONGO GODS

he had heard at second-hand, and altogether cut rather a sorry figure. He was vaguely aware that he was not making a particularly brilliant impression, and in an effort to recapture his host's wandering interest he launched into the story of his one real love affair—Marietta Fromont.

Old Hartley was already familiar with the story, though from a different angle. He was something of a Father Confessor to many of the younger men in the Congo service, and Holmsteen had confided to him his affair with Marietta and her cousin—who was none other than the hapless Lucien. The latter rose several degrees in Hartley's estimation because he didn't try to lie himself to a more gallant rôle in the rather shabby drama.

"He's a decent little chap after all," the Captain thought.

He was bored almost to extinction, but no trace of boredom was perceptible in his manner. He allowed his attention to wander, only oc-

## LUCIEN MEETS YAJA

casionaly interjecting some comment or putting some question. It took little encouragement to keep Lucien talking, and that was really all that he needed. . . . That, and a little calomel.

Lucien was allowed to have dinner on the bridge, but as soon as the coffee was finished, he received a polite but firm hint to disappear down in the lower regions where he belonged. There were, after all, limits to Hartley's patience.

"Artley," Fania said to her master a couple of evenings later, "the little white man is crying in his cabin. Capita says he cries every night."

"Does he?" Hartley was rather curt, because they were stalled with an accident to the paddle wheel that promised to hold them up for a couple of days. "I suppose he is lonesome for his mamma. He's only a child."

"He is a child," Fania agreed. "He gets black (she meant red) in the face when I speak to him."

## CONGO GODS

She was quiet for a few minutes, then came back to the subject.

"Listen, Artley. My sister's daughter, Yaja, the little Basenge woman who came with the soldiers from Kasai, is in mourning for her man, Masua, he who fell overboard."

"And quite proper of her," Hartley yawned.

"She is not grieving quite so much now," Fania admitted. . . . "But listen, Artley, why can't I bring her to the little white man. Then they can console each other."

"Or howl together. . . . Yes, go ahead, it's a good idea. Then I won't have him hanging around the bridge all day."

And so it was arranged.

Lucien had just crawled under his mosquito netting for the night and had begun to contemplate his misery and to open up the faucets of his tears, when he became aware of an unusual tittering and whispering outside of his cabin. Then the door was flung open, Yaja, newly

## LUCIEN MEETS YAJA

washed, anointed and perfumed, pushed into his room, and the door slammed after her.

Lucien sat bolt upright on the edge of his bed and stared. . . . As for Yaja, she remained standing in the center of the floor, her eyes coyly lowered, her knees pressed modestly together, like Susanne before the council.

And there she was allowed to stand for what seemed an interminable time, while Lucien did nothing but stare with large, uncomprehending eyes. At last she sighed deeply, and turned, as if to leave. Then Lucien came to life, for great is the power of Eros, even if his color is black. . . .

When the *Deliverance VI* finally reached Basoko, a full week later, Lucien went on land with firm step and head erect. He looked just the man to fill his modest position in the Congo Free State's administration. And behind him, arrayed in all her finery and holding a red silk parasol over her head, tripped Yaja.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE BLACK EROS

THAT the black Eros was the most popular of all the Congo Gods, it would be difficult to deny. Outside the matter of color, the boy is much like his white brother, Cupid, though somewhat more primitive in his manners. He is distantly related to Mozuri's God, Chembe, he who created the world and peopled it with men and women. The black Eros has his arrows, just as his Cupid, but for the white men who have the temerity to invade his domains, his darts are poisoned.

In the piping years of General van Gele's administration it was Bacchus and Mars, rather than the black Eros, who was worshiped at Basoko Station. Those were strong men, iron

## CONGO GODS

men, who ruled the District then. There was old Judge Jon Holmsteen, famous for his good dinners, his good heart, and his violent hatred of all missionaries; and there was Doctor Avezius, who always warned his patients against the use of alcohol and was known the length and breadth of the Congo for his *Marsala* and his *Lacrymæ Christi*, wines fit for the gods,—white gods. And there was Sorenstjerne, of the breed of the Vikings, huge and blond, whose red hair was a never ending marvel to the natives,—a great trader and a great fighter. And there was old van Gele himself, almost as round as he was high, genial and hearty and bluff, a tremendous worker and a tremendous eater, who had an amazing knack of getting rubber and ivory out of the natives and coöperation and loyalty from his subordinates. Men of iron these were, men who could fight like lions and drink like fish, and who loved their life in the Congo.

It was the heroic age. The prestige of the

## THE BLACK EROS

conquerors of Rechad and Sefu was still resplendent in the banners of the Congo Free State. The glory of victory, symbolized in the gold star on the blue background, shone over the victors and gave them the luster of gods. Even their dissipations were cast in a heroic mold.

There were black ladies, then, too, but they were in the background, not at the dinner table. The offerings to the black Eros were private, not public. Van Gele's chief pleasures, when he was not "pacifying" the District, were to quarrel bitterly with the Catholic missionaries and to drink his comrades under the table. Good, wholesome pleasures, too.

The mortality rate among the whites was frightful: two deaths a year, neither more nor less, in a personnel of ten men,—twenty per cent. And those who did not remain under the damp black earth returned to Europe. The personnel of the Station changed with extraordinary rapidity. Van Gele, Holmsteen, Avezius,



## CONGO GODS

and Sorenstjerne went back home, and in due time others came to take their places. Men of a different clay, chosen by different standards. Nice people.

The atmosphere of the Station changed.

No longer did military music disturb the quiet of the jungle until far into the morning, while raucous laughter, the crash of glasses and discordant songs rose to the eternal stars. Instead wondering blacks observed a new Chief more interested in maintaining dignity than in maintaining peace, a Judge who, arrayed in white robes and holding a flickering candle in his hand, walked in procession with missionaries, and a doctor so concerned with the vicissitudes of his own temperature that he had no time for his patients. It was a new régime.

The relations between the whites themselves underwent a subtle change. Covert malice and written complaints replaced the boisterous quarrels and more boisterous peace-making of an earlier day. The common mess broke up into

## THE BLACK EROS

small groups who ate at their own tables in the dismal exclusiveness of veranda corners and economized on wine. Conversation was replaced by gossip.

And in place of Bacchus men worshiped Eros.

Some of the new officials brought their wives out with them from Europe, and some of those who were not fortunate enough to have wives sought to ingratiate themselves with those who had,—with the results which were to be expected. The others cultivated black goddesses.

They cultivated them to excess, and with an ardor that was quite indecent. The atmosphere became surcharged with eroticism. Triangles and quadrangles, white and black, were made and dissolved. And while the amount of alcohol consumed at the Station sank to a fraction of its former volume, the mortality rate remained quite stationary. Two deaths a year for every ten whites, three for fifteen, four for twenty,—neither more nor less. The only difference was in the number of sick days, which doubled.

## CONGO GODS

It was in this period of transition from the old to the new that little Lucien Dubois came out to the Congo and to Basoko. Though he himself was completely unaware of it, he was one of those chosen by the new régime in Brussels, rather for moral than for intellectual qualities. Indeed a warm recommendation for virtue and moral purity from Father Daniels had more to do with his appointment than anything else.

What Father Daniels would have said had he seen Lucien now, with Yaja tagging along at his heels, only Heaven and the Catholic Church know. He could scarcely admit that a live sinner is worth more than a dead saint. Yet that Lucien would have departed this life had not Hartley and Fania joined him to Yaja, there can be little doubt. That he would have departed it as a saint is open to question.

As it was now Lucien strode onto land with more self-confidence and courage than he had ever experienced before. His new sense of manhood gave him a certain strength and feeling of

## THE BLACK EROS

responsibility and put him in excellent spirits. He was utterly innocent of any thought of debasement in his relation with Yaja. He did not consider her a mistress, but loved her with as much devotion as passion. Marietta Fromont faded away to a pale memory.

Lucien stood and looked about him, taking in his new home, feeling already a part of it. For the first time the strange beauty and fascination of Africa gripped him, that beauty and fascination which Kipling has expressed with such perfection.

For her heathen beauty drew  
And her heathen beauty drew  
Christian gentlemen a few  
Hotly to attend her.

That was it—heathen beauty—not the pagan beauty of ancient Hellas or Rome, but a much more primitive, a more natural heathen beauty, —black as the tropic night, crimson as gushing blood, dark violet green like the shadows of the

## CONGO GODS

forests, voracious like the great horn-backed crocodile, and withal innocent as nature itself. Dimly Lucien felt some of all this as he gazed around him at his new home.

Basoko Station lies just within the juncture of the black Aruvini with the Congo, hidden from view by a couple of heavily forested islands. With its glaring white-washed stockade wall, its neat little red brick houses, each with a screened-in veranda, its even rows of well kept mango trees, bending under their rich green and yellow fruit, it looked for all the world like some toy town. Just a mile up the river lies the cemetery, with scores of gleaming white crosses. Here Grenfell lies buried—Grenfell, missionary, geographer, explorer, gentleman. Behind the Station and above it, framing it somberly, is the great olive-green forest, and over it all an endless expanse of sky and a cruel burning African sun.

This is how Lucien first saw Basoko and this is how it looks to-day, except that the cemetery

## THE BLACK EROS

is a little larger. A good place to be buried in, when one is tired of living.

But thanks to Captain Hartley and to Fania, and above all to Yaja, Lucien was no longer tired of living.

The Station Chief, M. Rougemont, greeted Lucien cordially and showed him to the house which had been assigned him. It was a small, one-roomed structure, with a commodious screened-in veranda and a kitchen-shed behind it. A Boy was placed at his disposal, and after dinner a cook announced himself. For the first time in his life Lucien was head of a household.

Joyously, buoyantly, he entered upon his honeymoon—even though his bride was black. Let none begrudge him his happiness.



## CHAPTER VIII

### MASUA'S MIRACLE

IF, after explaining the meaning of the word, one had asked old Mozuri whether his God could perform miracles, that wise old witch doctor would, in all probability, have answered in the negative. Miracles, he would have affirmed, do not exist—they are merely the consequence of forces that we do not understand. Yet even he would have admitted that it was something of a miracle that Masua wasn't drowned after all when he tumbled off the stern of the *Deliverance VI* into the waters of the Congo.

That mighty river is not accustomed to surrendering its victims, and few who fall into its



## CONGO GODS

swirling waters escape drowning or the voracious crocodiles.

It was the cordwood that proved his salvation. As it spilled down over him one piece hit him on the head and stunned him and another struck him in the stomach and knocked all the wind out of him; and so, though he sank at once, he didn't get enough water in his lungs to drown him, and the swift current carried him into the foliage of a submerged tree and lodged him there.

It was here that the quick eye of Marini of the Bangala village of n'Dobo discovered him. In the same instant a crocodile, which had taken to safety during the monsoon, made the same discovery.

It was a race—or rather a regatta—between the two, and Marini, who was the nearer, won. He managed to jab his fishing spear through Masua's arm and haul him into his canoe just as the crocodile snapped his ugly jaws around Masua's left foot. For a moment things looked

## MASUA'S MIRACLE

bad for the embryo Liberator of Africa. But while crocodiles have a stubborn tenacity in their highly specialized art, they are not entirely immune to certain arguments, and when this particular crocodile, which was not a very large or powerful one, felt the head of Marini's spear in his eye, he loosed his prey and sank to the bottom at once. So Marini was the victor.

The Hope of Africa might yet have found an inglorious end in a cooking pot had he not discreetly come to life before his captor could visit that crowning indignity upon him. Poor Marini nearly lost his mind when the corpse that he had fished out of the river suddenly grabbed him around the wrist. Fortunately for Masua there was, at the moment, no lack of soup meat in the village of n'Dobo, so Marini refrained from killing his capture forthright. Instead he sent one of his sons to fetch the chieftain and the witch doctor for a consultation.

They both returned with the Boy, for they felt that this was a situation which demanded

## CONGO GODS

careful consideration and concerned the tribe as a whole. The witch doctor, who looked for all the world like Mozuri of Lufari's village, and was almost as wise, examined Masua with a critical eye and, concluding that he would be worth more alive than dead, cleansed the two ugly wounds and bound them up. He and the chieftain then concurred in the opinion that Marini was entitled to keep his capture as a slave, provided he gave a suitable present to the latter. . . . In case Masua should die, the body was to be divided in accordance with the customary rules.

When this decision had been announced the fortunate Marini treated his distinguished guests to a dinner of fish and olive oil, and entertained them with a dramatic if somewhat embroidered recital of his struggle with the crocodile. Although the size of the animal could be roughly computed from the scars left on Masua's foot by its teeth, it became, in Marini's narrative, a very large crocodile,—a monster crocodile, in-

## MASUA'S MIRACLE

deed, the Father of all crocodiles. . . . Perhaps, —perhaps it was not even a crocodile at all, but a river spirit who had temporarily chosen that particular form. . . . What did the witch doctor think?

When he had made this suggestion, Marini paused, somewhat taken aback at the boldness of his own idea. It was rather a disconcerting thought, for if the crocodile should indeed have been a river spirit, then it would surely avenge itself upon him. . . . It might even wreak vengeance upon the whole village. . . . Best not pursue that line of thought too far.

The old witch doctor nodded ponderously, and managed to look incredibly profound. After he had deliberated sufficiently he volunteered that river spirits were not accustomed to surrender their spoils without some compensation . . . or revenge. He didn't elaborate on this unpleasant idea at the moment, for he could not forget that he was Marini's guest, but the simple remark was enough to make cold shivers run up and

## CONGO GODS

down Marini's spine. In the event any of the villagers should drown or meet with any other misfortune in the near future, he could scarcely escape the responsibility.

The witch doctor went on to state his tentative opinion that this extraordinary capture held some very special significance for Marini,—an augur of good fortune, or a foreboding of evil,—it was difficult to say which. . . . Further than this he was unwilling to commit himself for the present. . . . In three days there would be a full moon, and then he could ask the spirits.

Marini suddenly remembered a black-and-white kid that he had in his flock. . . . Perhaps its entrails might be of use in the contemplated incantation? He would be delighted to send it to his honored guest the very next day.

This happy suggestion met with the unqualified approval of the ancient soothsayer. . . . A kid, particularly a black-and-white kid, was exactly what was needed for such consulting of the auguries as he would perform. . . . And

### MASUA'S MIRACLE

of course he would return the meat to his host. . . .

Marini hastened to assure him that he should banish such an idea from his mind. The meat he was to keep for himself,—as a slight honorarium for his services.

Thereafter the witch doctor became somewhat less mysterious in his counsel than he had been heretofore. He advised Marini to take good care of Masua because a live slave, even a crippled one, was worth considerably more than his weight in soup meat, and he showed him how to cleanse and bind the wounds. Whereupon he and the chieftain, having emptied the fish dish and likewise the jar of olive oil, took their departure, escorted on their way by the grateful Marini.

The auguries having been duly consulted were found favorable, and Masua was retained by Marini as a slave. He made rapid progress toward recovery, and within a week or two was able to hobble about and to help the women in

## CONGO GODS

the lighter tasks, particularly basket-weaving, wherein he was wonderfully proficient. He showed the village smith a new way to harden spear and arrow heads, and excelled all the young men in hurling a spear, and was consequently held in high repute. Then two of Marini's daughters conceived a violent passion for their handsome Kasai slave, and he was about to be adopted into the tribe, technically as Marini's slave but actually as his son-in-law, when he confounded all their plans by stealing a canoe, one dark night, and escaping down the river. It was a mean trick, but Masua had his own plans. . . . He avoided the main current of the Congo, and weaving in and out of the innumerable islands that dot it along this stretch, he managed to elude his pursuers and after three days to reach the soldiers' camp at Lisala.

Here he was lucky enough to find some of his own countrymen to whom he could relate the story of his adventures and who took him to the white officers and explained who he was and

## MASUA'S MIRACLE

what he wanted. After a doctor had examined the ugly wound in his foot and pronounced it to be beyond danger of infection he was duly enrolled in Company Five, and thus inaugurated his military career.

He was supplied with a blanket, a blue linen blouse, a pair of blue linen trousers, a leather belt with a bayonet and cartridge bag, and a scarlet red fez with a blue tassel. After a few weeks of training he was entrusted with an old albin rifle,—a primitive, non-repeating breech-loader of heavy caliber,—a highly inaccurate but nonetheless effective weapon. Masua's ancient scar on the thigh could attest to that. A small brass plate that hung from his neck bore his number—1275—and he was entered in the camp records as a volunteer of the Basenge race with a pay of three and one-half francs a month.

And so Masua's little affair with the crocodile didn't retard the fulfillment of his plans very much after all.



## CONGO GODS

Masua was a good soldier. He learned to stand at attention, to salute, to make left and right turns—it didn't take him more than five minutes to grasp the concept of "left" and "right"—to mark time and to keep step. He was, his corporal early observed, a natural born soldier. His thirst for knowledge was avid, and he absorbed it as a swamp absorbs moisture. New experiences flooded in on him, overwhelmed and engulfed him. His great plan, his ambition, even his hatred for the white masters, sank to the bottom of his soul and were covered over with new impressions.

His alertness and willingness soon attracted the attention of the officers and it was not many months before he was made a corporal and, along with some twenty other natives, sent to school for two hours a day. Here he began to learn the white *mayele* in earnest—through the medium of their language.

Forever after, in his turbulent and colorful warrior's life, Masua looked back on these years

## MASUA'S MIRACLE

at Lisala as the happiest of his life. A new world was opening to him, a vast new varied world of knowledge and of living, and he entered it confidently and hopefully. From the harsh, throbbing reveille in the gray dawn, through the hot, hard drill under the burning sun, to the soothing taps at night, he was inundated with new experiences. Magically he was metamorphosed from a savage to a civilized man.

One evening, a little over a year after he had first come to Lisala, it occurred to him that this wonderful system of writing that he was even then laboriously learning, could be used to find his Yaja for him. It was a bold idea, and he pondered it for a few days before he disclosed it to some of his fellow non-coms of his own race. After due deliberation, they advised him to take the problem to the Company Commander, Captain Durand.

Carefully choosing the one hour in the week when the Captain would be most likely to be at leisure—Sunday morning between Parade and

## CONGO GODS

dinner—Masua approached the veranda where Durand, in immaculate white, was even then reclining in his porch chair gazing thoughtfully out across the river, and stood at attention.

Captain Durand liked this young Kasai soldier with the intelligent black eyes and the firm chin and the soldierly carriage, who had more than once come to him with his problems.

"Well, what do you want, my boy?" he asked.

"*Mon Capitaine*," Masua began, and Durand smiled, for the French salutation is ordinarily required only of commissioned officers. "*Mon Capitaine*, I want to ask your advice in a matter that concerns me. . . ."

"Fire away, Masua."

What was it he was going to say. . . ? As a matter of fact Masua hadn't given much thought to Yaja in the last year. With the fatalism that is characteristic of the African negro he had accepted the accident that separated them as an unalterable dispensation of the gods. Now the longing for her had bobbed

## MASUA'S MIRACLE

up in him, strong and fresh, and he was confused. It was not so easy to explain it all to a white man. . . .

"Well, what is it, Masua?" Durand encouraged him a little impatiently.

Then Masua began to tell about Yaja who was his *Mamajango*, how he had acquired her and how he had lost her. He told about the journey from Italemba and about the white man at Kwamouth who had tried to take her from him and had died the next night, and about the great tree that burned. . . . He began his tale sensibly enough, but as one memory after another came back to him he became confused and discursive and prolix. The trouble was that in telling his story Masua came, for the first time, face to face with his former self, and the meeting disconcerted him. He had almost forgotten that earlier Masua, Lufari's son. The little village on the banks of the Kasai, old Mozuri the witch doctor, his mother, the head *Katenge*, Yaja, whom he had loved—all seemed incredibly

## CONGO GODS

distant and unreal. And so Masua's story degenerated into such a garble of marriage negotiations and crocodiles and burning trees that Captain Durand couldn't make head or tail of it.

"You're jabbering like a Bushman," he burst out impatiently. "What's all this nonsense about crocodiles, anyway? Start all over again and try to get your story straight. . . . You had a wife. . . ."

And because Captain Durand was exceptionally tactful and understanding he finally succeeded in drawing the essential facts out of Masua. The transport, *Esabee n'Aruvimi*, he identified as the *Deliverance VI*, and since that ship was ordinarily stationed at Basoko and went down the river only at long intervals to pick up batches of native recruits, it was not difficult to ascertain at what time Masua and his fellow volunteers from Lufari had passed Lisala on the way to Bumba, a couple of hundred miles farther up. When he had satisfied himself on this point, Captain Durand wrote a personal let-

## MASUA'S MIRACLE

ter to Captain Loudon, in command at Bumba, inquiring whether Yaja had disembarked from the *Deliverance VI* with the recruits from the Kasai the previous year. It was some time before Captain Loudon replied rather curtly that there hadn't been any woman with the Kasai detachment at all, and that the Commander at Camp Bumba had other things to do than keep track of soldiers' wenches.



## CHAPTER IX

### LUCIEN LOSES YAJA

IN the Congo, as almost everywhere in Africa, the variations in temperature in twenty-four hours can be most startling.

Lucien, who had gone through his first light attack of malaria with considerable trepidation, thinking momentarily that he was about to die, was now almost himself again. He lay under his mosquito netting until well past midnight perspiring and uncomfortable, and then, in the ensuing hours of coolness, enjoyed a few undisturbed hours of sleep, only to wake up, along toward morning, shivering with cold. He drew his heavy woolen blanket up over him. But he was unable to get back to sleep. In truth, he had just about slept himself out in the days of



## CONGO GODS

his convalescence, and as soon as he was warm again, he felt comfortable and wide-awake.

Over on a camp cot in one corner of the room lay Yaja.

Lucien longed to feel her arms around his neck again, and he considered awakening her, but he was too shy. Then he remembered that this was the day he was to begin work. Languidly he got up and dressed, being sensible enough to put on his European overcoat over his tropical clothes. Just as he came out on the veranda his cook came trudging along, all wrapped up in a woolen blanket and shivering with cold, but nevertheless noiseless and swift. He began to rummage around in the little kitchen, and inside a few minutes a tiny red glow in the rude brick oven gave a comforting assurance of awakening life and warmth.

In the east a gray stripe above the tree tops gave the first faint glimmering of day—a stripe that suddenly became bright as opal. And in the

## LUCIEN LOSES YAJA

same moment all the birds of the forest joined in a pæan of welcome to the new day.

Soon the cook came in with a cup of hot black coffee, made from the beans of the Basoko plantation, and while Lucien sipped the pleasant, steaming brew, the dawn suddenly became day, clear and bright, as if the wick of a lamp had been turned up while he was not looking.

The bugler, too, was early astir, and before Lucien had finished his coffee he was startled by the rousing notes of the reveille that summoned the personnel of the post, black and white, to their duties. Lucien went into the house and kissed Yaja good-by, before he rushed off to the roll-call. She submitted to this curious custom with on the whole admirable patience, but that she enjoyed it is highly dubious; in any event, she always wiped her lips off afterwards. Her own gestures of affection were much gentler and coyer: an affectionate rub of her cheek against his shoulder, a timid caress with her delicate little chocolate fingers on his arm,

## CONGO GODS

a quick arch glance from under the long eyelashes,—these were her gestures and she never volunteered any others either with Masua or with Lucien. Dalliance was not to her taste, and she never really learned it.

Lucien's work was comparatively easy. It was, indeed, not very different from the sort of thing he had done at Tietz Brothers in Brussels. He spent somewhat over half of his time opening packages and mail bags, sorting letters into their proper bags, and readdressing mail to other stations. The rest of his time was at the disposal of Rougemont, who used him as a general clerk and placed him in the warehouse where he sat hour after hour counting brass bars, measuring fathoms of cretonne and cotton, and checking over endless lists of supplies. For the more practical work with the natives in the field or the forest, he showed not the slightest aptitude. He entertained, indeed, an insuperable fear of the great forest which hemmed in the little settlement, and during his entire residence at Ba-

## LUCIEN LOSES YAJA

soko he never ventured further than a hundred yards within its confines. Once Colonel Bangsbo, the temporary District Superintendent, proposed to send him around the neighboring villages to take a census of the native population, but Lucien's nervousness was so apparent that the Colonel reluctantly abandoned that well-meant plan.

Lucien was a townsman, and a townsman he remained even in the wilds of Africa. His whole world was limited to the tiny area inside the whitewashed stockade and its score of whites and hundred blacks. The walls of the stockade gave him something of that sense of security that his cabin aboard the *Deliverance VI* had, for however useless they might have been in actual warfare, they marked for him the confines of civilization and shut out the great primitive, terrifying world beyond.

Rougemont, who was a combination of a coward and a bully, Lucien disliked cordially, but the other whites he admired and respected, and

## CONGO GODS

they, in turn, regarded him with a kindly if somewhat contemptuous toleration. To them he was always "little Dubois." He joined no cliques, cemented no friendships, and his chief interest, almost his exclusive interest, was Yaja. It was probably because she was the first and only woman he had ever lived with that she played so dominant a rôle in his life,—or, to use his own expression, that "he loved her so dearly."

That first night with her aboard the *Deliverance VI* was not a pleasant recollection. Had he heard what Captain Hartley said to Fania as they brought Yaja to him—"Now they can bawl together," his ears would have burned for a long time. For bawl is exactly what they did.

What seemed to him now the most idiotic part of it all was the way he had let her stand there in the middle of the floor for almost half the night. . . . It was not until a tired little smile had appeared on her face and she had sighed lightly and made a move toward the door, that

## LUCIEN LOSES YAJA

he had come to life. He had jumped up and seized her and led her to his bed.

Marietta Fromont, with that curious cruelty that leads women to torture the men who love them and are consequently helpless, had told him of another night of love—one quite different from this one. It was for his own sake, she assured herself, that she told him.

“Now listen, my little friend,” she had explained, “it’s no use being angry at him. (She meant Holmsteen, of course.) It’s no use. It wasn’t him, after all. When I begged him to let me go, he did. He escorted me to the stairs, and if I hadn’t looked around, I would have been all right. It was my own fault,—and I couldn’t help it either. When I got to the landing I turned around and waved to him, and then he was down with me in one bound and carried me up in his arms. . . .

“You must be strong if you want women to love you,” she had added cynically.

Yes, indeed, that was a different night of

## CONGO GODS

love, Marietta's. . . . But she was right. One must be strong. . . .

But to Yaja.

For a long time she had lain in his arms and stared at him with her great black eyes. Then suddenly she started to talk, and for almost an hour she poured forth an incoherent flood of words, all of which were, of course, quite unintelligible to Lucien. When she was through she began to cry, very quietly, and then he, too, had opened up the ready faucets of his tears.

But never again!

From the first he had been utterly wrapped up in her. She metamorphosed that slow trip up the river from a nightmare of dullness to a real honeymoon.

As for Yaja, after her aunt Fania had gone off with Captain Hartley on the SS. *Hainault* and her countrymen had disembarked at *Bumba*, Lucien was her only link with the past, and she clung to him with a childlike faith and devotion. She could not speak a word of Bangalese, and

## LUCIEN LOSES YAJA

until she picked up some of the dialect and adjusted herself to her new surroundings at Basoko, she was wholly dependent upon Lucien. When he left in the morning she sat and moped all day in her room, not daring even to let Lucien's Boy come in to make the bed.

Her distrust of the Boy was not altogether unfounded. The first time he had come in to make the beds he had tried to seduce her. When Lucien heard of it he was furious, and surprised both the Boy and himself by giving him a real drubbing. The little tableau closed appropriately with Yaja clinging to him and repeating a phrase he had taught her, "Yaja is yours." . . .

Incidentally this episode showed how abysmally ignorant both of them were of those unwritten laws of the Congo that control the relations between white men and black women. In the first place unfaithfulness with another black is not counted as such when the third person in the triangle is a white man. In the second place



## CONGO GODS

the Boys of the white men had a sort of vested right to the favors of their master's *menagères*. Both Lucien and Yaja were consequently objects of amusement among the inhabitants of the Station, white and black. It was thought somewhat childish in them to make such a scene over the matter of the Boy's advances.

Written laws are not of very great importance, but not with impunity can one break the unwritten laws of a land. Lucien and Yaja broke them, not by living together, but by living as man and wife, in the sight of God, and by loving each other like a pair of turtledoves.

That sort of thing irritates one's fellow-men.

The six months that Lucien lived with Yaja was probably the happiest period of his whole life. Then, out of the clear sky, came disaster. Rougemont, motivated as much by meanness and envy as by passion, lured Yaja away from him, and Lucien's life was shattered.

It all began with Yaja's love for finery,—wherein she was not very different from Marietta

## LUCIEN LOSES YAJA

Fromont. Even back in Lufari's village Yaja had known how to decorate her body with the most elaborate tattooing, discreetly placed where it would not mar her natural beauty nor fail to show off her charms. And here in Basoko she didn't want to be behind the other black women of the Station in dress.

Poor little Lucien was at an insuperable disadvantage in any competition, for Rougemont not only had a very handsome salary, but he held the keys to the warehouse. . . . And so Lucien lost Yaja.

Incidentally Rougemont's conduct was generally considered reprehensible by the other whites, and it occasioned no little gossip and eventually got to the ears of the authorities, and created something of a scandal. There was widespread sympathy for Lucien, too, for he took Yaja's desertion greatly to heart and succumbed to melancholia. What would have happened to him had not his old friend, Colonel Bangsbo, come to his rescue, it is hard to say.

## CONGO GODS

Bangsbo took the lad with him on a trip into the interior, and kept him so busy that he hadn't any time for moping. And on the conclusion of the trip he induced the administration to assign Lucien to Irebu Station.

Irebu Station was one of the most happily located and wisely planned in all the Congo. It lay in the open, the center of a colorful and numerous native population. There were few white men buried in its graveyard, and because of its location at the juncture of the Congo and the Ubangi Rivers it was visited almost daily by boats.

Lucien was extraordinarily fortunate in his new chief, too,—a quiet, phlegmatic, good-natured Swiss, M. Constant. Here at Irebu he became Lucien's superior officer, elder brother, and father confessor.

These two, Lucien and Constant, got along famously together.

After a few months Lucien was able to take care of all the clerical side of the administration.

## LUCIEN LOSES YAJA

He wrote up the reports, took care of the mail and filled out the endless lists and forms by the aid of which the Congo administration controls its functionaries and regulates its business. Constant, on the other hand, was able to devote all of his time to the more practical side of the administration—working the plantation, clearing the forests, and maintaining order among the natives. It was a singularly happy arrangement.

Every evening they sat together for a couple of hours on Constant's veranda, thoughtfully sipping their beer as they watched the sunset, or chatting together like old friends, and they learned to understand each other and to bear with each other.

The weeks and the months passed uneventfully. Lucien became proficient in his tasks, and he even learned to get along, after a fashion, with the natives. He received his salary raises when they were due, and finished out his three-year term without any further mishap. His rec-

## CONGO GODS

ord had not been a brilliant one, but everything considered, he had reason to be pleased with it and with himself.

At the end of three years he was given an honorable discharge and returned to Belgium. The under-secretary of Foreign Affairs decorated him with the *Etoile de Service*, the little silver medal that is the reward of those who complete their term of service without any serious scandal. It's not much of a decoration, to be sure, but after all it is something—an official stamp of approval, a badge of maturity. It was with considerable pride that Lucien wore it in his buttonhole.

It was a great hour for him when he presented himself to his mamma and his papa back in Malines, not only a *Monsieur*, but a *Monsieur décoré*.

Rougemont, who had stolen Yaja from him, got his deserts.

He was a sensuous man, and something of a

## LUCIEN LOSES YAJA

neurasthenic, and he was soon passionately in love with Yaja.

She didn't care a fig for him, fleeced him ruthlessly and tormented him to desperation.

Rougemont had broken one of Africa's unwritten laws when he seduced Yaja with his gifts; he broke another when, on discovering that she was flagrantly unfaithful to him, he tried to thrash her—without much success.

Due partly to Yaja's incessant exactions, partly to his own carelessness and extravagance, he created a deficit so large that he was no longer able to conceal it from the authorities by juggling his accounts. He was not cashiered, but he had to forfeit well-nigh a year's salary, and was demoted to a little post far in the interior, near the border of Ungada. The bitterest blow of all was that Yaja refused to go with him into exile. . . .

He died at his Post about a year later.

"*Malame na je,*" said Yaja when she heard of his demise—"Good enough for him."



## CHAPTER X

### BANGSBO AND YAJA

By this time Yaja had become a stunning beauty, measured even by European standards. She was full-grown now, a magnificent creature, full of life and vivacity of wisdom and of deviltry.

She had already learned much from men—from Masua, from Lucien, from Rougemont, and from the others to whom she had given herself. Masua had been her real love, her first love; Lucien had aroused all of her tenderness; Rougemont had inspired her with a contempt for white men, and a saving cynicism. After her affair with him she attached herself to no one man, black or white, but from all her subsequent affairs she acquired wisdom and experience—and worldly goods.



## CONGO GODS

She became famous through the length and breadth of the Congo, famous for her bewitching beauty, for her ability to wind men around her finger, for her exploits, which were the talk of seven Districts.

"Who would have thought there was such a devil in the child," old Hartley muttered when he ran into her on the *Hainault* with Captain Holmsteen. Holmsteen figured out later that his ten-day honeymoon had cost him something over a month's salary.

She made M. Lamartine, the Chief Forester, happy for a month, and was, incredible as it sounds, the cause of a duel between that dignitary and M. Sutter, in which the former got a bullet in his left shoulder blade.

She lived with District Superintendent M. Forest for several months and left him for the arms of Inspector M. Renault.

When the Bank of Congo opened a branch at Stanleyville, Yaja was the first native to open an account there, and the sum she deposited ran

## BANGSBO AND YAJA

into four figures. . . . The cashier of the bank, M. Mercier, often frowned when he came to that account, and not without cause, for he had contributed one month's salary to it.

And then Yaja astonished the whole Belgian Congo by falling violently in love with Colonel Bangsbo. She lived with him as his humble and faithful mistress for over a year, and during all that time she didn't increase her bank account by so much as a sou.

But then there weren't many like Bangsbo.

In all the years he had been in the Congo service, he had scrupulously respected the taboo between white man and black woman. It was not that he was more moral than his fellow officers, or more prudish, but rather that he was more fastidious. . . . During those first four years of service, years in which he won laurels by subduing the Batatele and achieved fame as the "Hero of Kamembendi," he was indeed a mirror of virtues,—a hero out of a nursemaid's novel.

## CONGO GODS

**Then** he met Yaja, and fell into what Father Daniels would call "sin." In justice to him, however, it must be said that it was the woman who tempted him.

How it all came about Bangsbo told in a letter to his friend Hartley,—a letter that revealed a curious streak of introspection in this man of action.

" . . . and so now I have a mistress," he wrote, "a black mistress.

"She is the notorious Yaja, reputed to be the comeliest girl in all the Congo. She's quite up to her reputation too. . . . Well, you know her. But don't think I'm a sentimental old fool. I'm not in the least in love with the wench.

"She's the first native girl I've ever had anything to do with. . . . Not that I'm so virtuous. It's just that they simply never attracted me in the least. Ugh, preserve me from most of them. . . . Then the other night this child of darkness, Yaja, came strutting past my open tent, swaying her hips and smiling coquettishly

## BANGSBO AND YAJA

at me. Well, I looked at her,—she's a raving beauty at times, you know,—and I suddenly felt a desire for her. It came to me all at once that she was a black woman, if you know what I mean—the emphasis is on woman, not on black. For that matter she isn't black at all, but a real nut brown maid.

“I shan't pretend that I struggled heroically against temptation or any such nonsense. As a matter of fact I was rather pleased,—pleasantly surprised, like the first time I found that tomatoes were edible and that I liked them. . . . So I beckoned to her to come in, and she did.

“Now the little devil is regularly installed as my *menagère*. She's really quite amusing. The soldiers' wives no longer look upon me as a paragon of virtue, and Yaja rather plumes herself on that. Her reputation hasn't suffered any,—quite the contrary, but I fear that my prestige has a little. Well, no matter. . . .

“To-morrow I have to go down to Leopoldville to see the Governor. . . .”



## CHAPTER XI

### LUCIEN'S SECOND TERM

OF all the colonies founded by the conquering whites since, some five centuries ago, they entered upon the task of subduing the earth and its teeming millions, none has experienced a more astonishing development than King Leopold's Congo. None has responded more marvelously to the magic of European exploitation nor adapted itself more readily to new conditions. In the course of a single generation it shot up in the dank air like the tropical plant that it was, passing through all the stages of development from blackest barbarism to a superficial civilization. And now, but a few brief years after the white man first took its destiny into this beneficent keeping, it is on the highroad to modernization and industrialization, with railroads,

## CONGO GODS

factories, power plants and other evidences of the so-called higher life.

In a general way we can count one year of Congo history as the equivalent of ten years of European, three years as the equivalent of a generation. What is true of the Congo under the influence of the whites is no less true of the whites under the influence of the Congo;—for them, too, three years was almost the equivalent of a generation. Under that scorching sun, in those dense, luxuriant forests, in that land of adventure and of danger, with disease and death lurking everywhere, men matured rapidly. The mortality rate was shockingly high and nature imposed a rigid survival of the fittest.

A generation ago a man who came out for a second term of service was something of a phenomenon. Now, of course, things are different: the vast improvement in hygiene and sanitation, and the veneer of European civilization, have made conditions somewhat more tolerable, and it is not rare to run across men in

## LUCIEN'S SECOND TERM

their third or even fourth term of service. Even now, however, the Congo is no easy mistress: few weaklings survive the first term, and none the second, and those who come through six years of service with their health and their morale more or less intact have a right to consider themselves veterans.

Lucien's three years under the Congo skies had matured him rapidly too, and though he was still "little Dubois" he felt that he had attained manhood. In any event when he took passage for his second term in the Congo colony he was older by far more than the mere four years that had elapsed since he first embarked on the *Leopold II* for the dark continent.

It had not been Lucien's intention to go out to Africa again. He planned to settle down in Belgium, to marry Marietta,—if she would have him,—and to forget about Africa as quickly as possible. But just as a matter of form he took the First Class Civil Service examination for the colonies, and passed it quite creditably.



## CONGO GODS

And before the month was out he began to long for Africa again.

Belgium, which from a distance had seemed lovely and romantic and idyllic—which had been synonymous with home and security and civilization—and love, Belgium now seemed a drab, stupid, over-crowded little country, cold and depressing, where the struggle for existence was savage and unrelenting. And Africa—the hated Africa—became by contrast clothed in the gorgeous raiment of romance and adventure,—became as alluring as its embodiment, Yaja.

By passing the Civil Service examination Lucien was automatically entitled to a position as first-class clerk in the Congo administration, and as week succeeded week, and no more inviting prospect than a job behind the socks counter in Tietz Brothers Department Store appeared, Lucien decided that he would go out to the Congo once more. . . . Besides, Marietta wasn't prepared to marry him yet. . . . He would be entitled to first-class passage and the

## LUCIEN'S SECOND TERM

rank and salary of an officer, and he could enjoy the sensation of looking down on the new batch of greenhorns. That was something.

And so, to make a long story short, we find Lucien once more disembarking at Boma on the mouth of the Congo, entraining there for Leopoldville, and taking passage on Captain Hartley's own ship—not the shabby little *Deliverance VI* this time, but the great *Kitamo*, to his old post at Basoko.

Hartley, himself quite unchanged except that his gray hair was a trifle thinner, remembered Lucien well, and welcomed him back to the Congo with characteristic graciousness.

"Well, and how is it with Mlle. Marietta,—that was her name, wasn't it?" he inquired solicitously.

Lucien blushed. Yes, that was right. He was engaged to her now and, if nothing went amiss, they were to be married as soon as he had served this term out.

"I would have wagered on it," Hartley

## CONGO GODS

thought to himself. "He's not the kind who is too proud to take leavings." But to Lucien he merely said:

"Congratulations, M. Dubois. I am sure you will be very happy. . . . We are going to pick up a few hundred troops from the camp at Lisala and take them on up to Basoko,—the natives in Lomami are on the warpath again. . . . Otherwise there's not much news. You may be interested to know that I have Yaja aboard. She followed Colonel Bangsbo here and he's sending her back with me. You'll doubtless see her around. . . . Well, it's been a pleasure to see you again, M. Dubois. Fatiki, show the gentleman to Cabin Three."

An hour later Yaja came aboard, accompanied by her aunt Fania.

Lucien hadn't seen her at close range since she deserted him for the now deceased Rouge-mont, and her beauty just about took the wind out of him. She was altogether too clever to ape the white ladies—and "ladies"—who had

## LUCIEN'S SECOND TERM

been coming out to the Congo in increasing numbers in the last few years. No corset or other European monstrosity disfigured her lovely body, and she ostentatiously kept to the native costume—a single garment. Yet she knew how to drape this around her so that she achieved a sophistication and elegance that might well have been the envy of many a Parisian *modiste*.

Even Fania, who was pretty enough to turn the head of many a man, both white and black, appeared commonplace and uninteresting beside Yaja, who looked like some dusky Helen of Troy as she advanced majestically on to the ship and across the deck toward her cabin.

Lucien was quite disconcerted. As he had informed Captain Hartley, he and Marietta had become engaged while he was home. But the engagement—as he had quite naturally neglected to tell—was a conditional one. Marietta had made the condition and it concerned little black girls like Yaja, for Lucien had been forced

## CONGO GODS

to promise absolute faithfulness to his fiancée in Belgium. And despite a rankling sense of the injustice, even the impropriety of the demand, he had not only promised to be faithful, but he even believed that he would keep his promise.

As far as the ethics of the relationships between white men and black girls—and more particularly between himself and Yaja—were concerned, he hadn't until recently given the matter any thought. The question had presented itself to him, however, through the medium of a novel he had picked up in the ship's library on the way out. It was a translation from the English—though Lucien hadn't noticed this, and the scene of the story was laid in Darkest Africa. The hero was a certain Lord Montague, a splendid fellow—who was captured by the King of Benin and ardently, though chastely, loved by the beautiful princess, Zucha-Zucha. The hero, however, refused to be seduced, and his faithfulness was eventually rewarded after

## LUCIEN'S SECOND TERM

his rescue, by marriage to the lovely and distinguished Lady Evelyn. The moral of the tale was obvious, and the story made it sufficiently clear that only the most degraded white men would ever stoop to have relations with native girls. . . . Lucien entertained a measureless and utterly uncritical respect for the written word, and when he contrasted his own short-lived idyll with Yaja to Lord Montague's chastity, his cheeks tingled with shame.

And yet he was sorely troubled. Was he, Lucien Dubois, really so degraded and contemptible? In that event, it was some consolation to reflect, practically all the white men in the Congo were in the same category with him. Even Captain Hartley and Colonel Bangsbo. It was all most confusing.

In any event, for the future Lucien had promised his Marietta that he would be *bien sage* . . . though, he reflected with some bitterness, Marietta was no Lady Evelyn. And wasn't it sufficient that he had promised to be

## CONGO GODS

a good father to the little golden-haired Swede who was the visible consequence of Marietta's own failure to be *bien sage*?

Yet, despite all of this, Lucien was doubtless quite sincere in his desire to emulate the dashing Lord Montague, and to keep his vows of faithfulness. But that didn't prevent his heart from beating like a trip hammer at the sight of Yaja.

She was not in the least embarrassed or disconcerted. When she caught sight of Lucien on the deck of the boat she flashed him her most radiant smile, and went over to him with outstretched hands.

"Just look, it's the white child. . . . So you have come back again. You are welcome, my friend—you come at just the right time. My Commanda has gone to Europe, and I am alone. If you want me again you may have me." And she snuggled up to the astonished Lucien with an old familiar affectionate gesture. "I'm sorry I left you for Rougemont," she continued in a

## LUCIEN'S SECOND TERM

low voice. "You are the best man I ever had since my own man, Masua, drowned. Shall I come to you to-night?"

Lucien nodded, dazed, and then suddenly put out his arms and embraced her. "My little Yaja," he murmured. "My own little Yaja."

"I'm not so little now," she replied. "See, I am quite as tall as you are. But I was little then, was I not?—little and foolish. We were both little then—we were two children,—do you remember? . . . I will come to-night, then. Good-by."

And she was out of his arms almost before he realized that he had been holding her,—out of his arms and back with her aunt Fania, who had been smiling at them with a motherly solicitude. Lucien stood and watched them until they disappeared up the stairs to the bridge.

A real beauty, she was, the little chocolate wench! Already Marietta began to recede imperceptibly into the background, to become as unreal as Europe itself in the face of the tre-



## CONGO GODS

mendous reality and vitality of Africa—and Yaja. Quite unconsciously Lucien began to compare the two girls who had figured so largely in his life. It wasn't pleasant for him to think too deeply about his relations with Marietta, for invariably he stumbled upon the fact that he was her second choice, and that she was hypocritical about it. . . . Yaja, at any rate, didn't pretend to be anything than what she was.

And now he could have her back. . . . A different Yaja, to be sure, from the little Bassege girl that he had first taken in his arms four years ago in the cabin of the *Deliverance VI*,—a woman now, the comeliest negress in all the Congo.

He collected his wits and went off to the bar in Leopoldville for a whisky and soda, like the man he felt himself to be. . . . When he returned he would find Yaja there. . . .

As for his promise to Marietta, well—promises like that, Lucien reflected, were made to be broken.

## LUCIEN'S SECOND TERM

But the Fates intervened, and Lucien's vows of chastity remained for the time being unbroken. For while he was off sipping his whisky and soda and reflecting that life was a very curious thing, a special train from Boma carrying a single passenger, Colonel Bangsbo, puffed into the station at Leopoldville.

The situation in the Lomami District had become so threatening that Governor Deitrich felt constrained to request Colonel Bangsbo to put off his return to Europe for the present and take personal charge of a campaign of pacification. And Bangsbo, like the good soldier that he was, had consented instantly and hastened back to Leopoldville on the special train that the Governor had placed at his disposal. . . .

And so all that Lucien heard of Yaja that night was a few tiny peals of laughter that penetrated the thin partitions which divided his cabin from that of Colonel Bangsbo.



## CHAPTER XII

### "THE WHITE MAN'S BURDEN"

M. VAN DER PUTTE, the new Superintendent of the District, with headquarters at Basoko, was a representative of the new régime. He was to inaugurate a new order of things, to introduce a more humane, a more conservative treatment of the natives. Ruthless, unvarnished exploitation was to be replaced by a policy of tender solicitude. For well-nigh a generation King Leopold's administration had milked the Congo mercilessly; suddenly this policy began to show diminishing returns and the powers that be decreed a change.

It was a change dictated by purely selfish economic considerations, but it masked itself under the name of morality. Dame Europe is a bourgeoisie creature, covetous and crafty, who in-

## CONGO GODS

variably recognizes necessity and just as invariably makes a virtue of it. One argument that is never lost upon her is the parable of the goose that lays the golden eggs. Only Dame Europe phrases it differently:

“Take up the white man’s burden . . .”

Van der Putte was a product of this new spirit. In his introductory talk to the personnel of his District he stressed the idealistic aspect of colonial enterprise. He painted in glowing colors the future economic and cultural development of the Belgian Congo,—the advance of Christianity, the triumphs of medicine and sanitation, the building of model villages and the education of the natives, the establishment of industries and the peaceful exploitation of the natural resources of the country.

His white personnel listened respectfully.

Mozuri’s God grinned.

This new régime was pretty hard on the veterans who couldn’t adjust themselves to it

## “THE WHITE MAN’S BURDEN”

over-night. They had been sent out to get rubber and to maintain order among the natives, and their efforts had been attended with unvarying success. Now many of them, after years of faithful service, were relegated to unimportant positions; others were ruthlessly sacrificed to the demands of the new policy—haled before newly instituted courts, charged with crimes which formerly had not been considered such, and discharged from the service. In this manner the new administration avoided the expense of pensions.

Bangsbo himself came near to being a sacrifice to the new morality.

In the first place he failed to get the appointment of District Superintendent to succeed old van Gele. In the second place he found himself forced to defend his record against serious charges that were preferred against him by the new Superintendent and the new judges. These assiduously gathered evidence to prove that Carl Bangsbo had been guilty of unnecessary

## CONGO GODS

violence and cruelty toward the natives, that he had been unable or unwilling to preserve order among his own troops, and that he was unfit to command an army of pacification. . . . All of this evidence van der Putte transmitted to the central office at Boma just as Bangsbo was about to depart for home.

Unfortunately for van der Putte things didn't work out in accordance with his calculations. There were several factors which he had failed to take into account when he denounced Bangsbo and which greatly altered the aspect of affairs. Carl Bangsbo and Governor Deitrich had fought shoulder to shoulder in the Batatele campaign and had been bosom friends ever since. The Governor, furthermore, entertained for van der Putte, as a representative of the new régime, a cordial dislike. And finally, just as Bangsbo was about to take passage for Belgium, a serious native revolt had broken out in the Lomami District, and he was hurriedly recalled to duty. His Excellency the Governor immediately placed the

## “THE WHITE MAN’S BURDEN”

revolting district under martial law, appointed Colonel Bangsbo Commander-in-chief of the expeditionary forces, and handed over to him, without comment, the whole mass of evidence which the unfortunate van der Putte had trumped up against him. A master stroke! Without committing himself in any way, Deitrich thus achieved all of his objects: the speedy suppression of the native revolt, the practical vindication of his friend Carl Bangsbo, the embarrassment of his enemy van der Putte. The latter’s prestige, already badly damaged by the native uprising, would receive a further jolt, and it was not improbable that Bangsbo would make life so unpleasant for the meddlesome District Superintendent that he would be forced to resign. A most delightful prospect all around.

Governor Deitrich was the soul of official correctness, and to Bangsbo he said not a word about this little tempest in the official teapot. But it was with no little satisfaction that he



## CONGO GODS

gave him his official credentials and placed his own private yacht at his disposal.

As for Carl Bangsbo, his feeling for van der Putte can scarcely be described as anger: it was to ordinary anger that nitroglycerine is to common black powder.

## CHAPTER XIII

### MASUA AND YAJA

THE *Kitamo* had been chosen for transporting the soldiers from the camp at Lisala to Basoko because it was not only the largest but also the fastest boat in the Congo marine and there was urgent need for haste. Captain Hartley, who knew the Congo as did no one else, ran her at full speed all day and at half speed from sunset to midnight. He sat up on the bridge and peered out into the darkness ahead, feeling his way, as it were, by the vague outline of the banks, a silent white figure puffing on a pipe. Two of the most trustworthy blacks sat on the bow of the boat, one on either side, scanning the surface of the water for floating logs or any signs of those tiny ripples that warned of some

## CONGO GODS

treacherous snag, some submerged tree whose branches could rip up the bottom of the *Kitamo's* hull as barb wire rips up a pair of old trousers. Steamboating on the Congo, with neither lights nor buoys, was a hazardous and exciting adventure.

On the morning of the ninth day after what was a record run from Leopoldville, the *Kitamo* steamed into Lisala harbor, and inside half an hour the soldiers came trooping aboard, 480 rifles strong. Yaja and Lucien were still fast asleep in their respective berths, but Bangsbo was up betimes to supervise the embarkment of the troops.

Three of the four platoons were officered by white lieutenants, the fourth by a tall, slim sergeant of the Kasai race—Masua himself. Bangsbo scrutinized him carefully, observed the intelligent care with which he handled his platoon, marked the quiet, confident voice with which he commanded instant obedience, and was satisfied with what he saw. The white man at

## MASUA AND YAJA

Italemba who, some four years earlier, had predicted that Masua would make a rattling good sergeant, had not been mistaken.

"There's chieftain's blood in his veins," was Bangsbo's comment to Hartley. "I'll wager he will be worth more than the other three put together. . . . A pretty worthless lot, these."

"Folley, Bouvard, Crochon," the three white lieutenants, presented themselves.

Colonel Bangsbo bowed courteously. A slight change in their names, he thought to himself, and they would have fitted to a "t"—"*Folie*," "*Buward*," "*Cochon*,"—fool, drunkard, swine. The African witch was no less powerful than the fabled Circe if these three were to be taken as typical examples of her genius. Their names, however, would have to be changed around. It was Crochon who looked like a half-wit, Folley's red nose and watery eyes that advertised his passion for the bottle, and Bouvard who was so fat that he positively wobbled as he walked. They were caricatures of the white

## CONGO GODS

officers of the Congo army, examples of the worst rather than of the best products, Bangsbo reflected bitterly, of the New Régime. Yet even they were doubtless not without their good points. After all, no one can remain even one term in the Congo without a certain amount of courage and perseverance. . . .

But it was with a feeling of relief that Bangsbo turned to the native sergeant. Masua, indeed, had developed into something quite out of the ordinary. He was now fully matured physically, and a splendid figure in his officer's uniform. His three years of arduous training, however, had not only metamorphosed his outward appearance, but had influenced even more profoundly his intellectual and psychological development. To a far greater extent than he had ever imagined he had acquired the white man's *mayele*.

He was, as Bangsbo had observed, something of a genius. An ordinary Congo negro does not get the whole drill book and field duty at his

## MASUA AND YAJA

finger tips inside of three years. Nor does he discover the world of information and wisdom that lies between the covers of other books. Masua had learned to speak and to read French, after a fashion, and even to write in large school-boy letters. Masua's passion for reading had been a standing subject of conversation at the mess table in Lisala, and the officers, particularly Captain Durand, had helped him by placing such books as they had at his disposal.

It was one of these that he was reading now with such concentration that he aroused the curiosity of his fellow-blacks. He had looked after all the details of his platoon, made the necessary provision for the comfort of his men, and settled the numerous petty altercations that arose between them. He was seated now on the deck, propped up against a box of provisions, deep in his book, while the *Kitamo* splashed its way up the river and the other officers whiled away the hours at cards.

Masua had acquired the book the previous

## CONGO GODS

evening from a fellow-officer, Lieutenant Vigny, in exchange for a crocodile tooth and two bottles of beer. There had been some fuss about it later on. Vigny, who was a little tipsy when he had made the trade, tried to buy it back again, and eventually took the matter to Captain Durand, but that eminently fair officer upheld Masua, and he kept the book. He was anxious now to discover what there was in it to warrant so much agitation. Before he delved into its contents he examined the paper wrapper curiously. It had a picture of a huge black man, in the full regalia of a French general, from the sword dangling at his side to the cockade hat perched jauntily over his brow. Across the bottom of the cover was written in bold type TOUSSAINT L'OVERTURE, HIS LIFE AND EXPLOITS. Masua had not read many pages before he realized why Lieutenant Vigny had entertained scruples about selling him the volume.

It was the story of a great man, a leader of his people, who had thrown off the yoke of the

## MASUA AND YAJA

whites and made himself ruler. A magnificent story, one to send the blood pounding in Masua's temples and to make his eyes light up with eagerness and hope. He lost himself in it, forgot his surroundings, the ship, the grinning or hostile negroes, the white Captain up on the bridge and the officers in the salon, all of the dull reality of the present. It was thus that Yaja discovered him.

So greatly had the passing years wrought upon them both that neither Yaja nor Masua recognized each other at once. Yaja was the first to be attracted and intrigued by a feeling of familiarity. This tall, slender officer, propped up against some boxes, lost in his book, seemed strangely familiar to her. To judge by his complexion he was one of her own countrymen. She stopped in front of him and spoke.

"Aren't you from Kasai?" she asked him.

He looked up. "I am Masua, son of Lufari, from Kasai. . . . And you, you are Yaja." He scrambled to his feet and stood facing her.



## CONGO GODS

There was no scene of any kind. It was all too sudden, too extraordinary, for that. Yaja swayed on her ankles a little, and put her hand on Masua's shoulder for support. When she had recovered, she took Masua's hands, according to Kasai custom, and said merely:

*"Botte, Masua."*

And Masua answered: *"Botte, mingi, Yaja."*

The soldiers, who were staring at them curiously, saw only a couple of natives from the same village who had happened to run into each other and who didn't show any especial pleasure in the meeting, at that.

After a moment of silence, Yaja went to her cabin, and Masua sat down again, and opened his book. . . . But he read no more that day. He had been living in the romantic world of Toussaint l'Overture and his magnificent struggle against the whites, but he was dramatically awakened from it and thrust back into his own scarcely less romantic past. The events of the last few years rushed across his mind in an

## MASUA AND YAJA

endless succession of pictures. And the great steamer bearing him up the river, past the familiar banks, helped to give to those pictures the semblance of reality. . . .

There over on the farther shore, half hidden by a copse of trees, lay Marini's dirty little village. Masua looked down at his foot where he could still see the scars left by the sharp teeth of the crocodile. . . . And just a little farther along was the place where he had fallen overboard. . . . He remembered how he had been sitting on the deck, even as he was now, and a thunderstorm had come up. He had clambered across the wood pile to shelter, and then the pile suddenly tumbled down over him and everything had gone black.

Curious how everything seemed the same again, and how he seemed to pick up the threads of life where they had been broken off. Here he had lost Yaja, and now she bobbed up again, in the same place. . . . Even the little white man sitting over there on a deck chair with a

## CONGO GODS

despondent look on his face was the same one who had sat on the deck of the *Esabee n'Aruvimi*, and the Captain up on the bridge, *Mayele Mungo*, was the same.

Only the boat had grown much larger. And he. . . .

He saw himself back again in Lufari's village, standing in the center of a great circle, talking to the old men, telling them how he would capture the *mayele* of the white man, while the light from the fire flickered on their solemn old faces and the night and the jungle closed in about them. . . . Then he saw himself at the prow of one of the white men's boats, filled with hundreds of black warriors whom he was leading on to battle against their white masters. For a moment that seemed eternity he lost himself in this vision. . . . A mighty whirlwind howled in his ears and he felt the wing beats of myriad invisible creatures as they swept past him. The door of eternity seemed to swing open to him to reveal the future. . . .

## MASUA AND YAJA

Then his vision crashed around him and he returned to reality. He looked about him, at the familiar shores of the river, at the motionless white figure up on the bridge, at the black soldiers who were regarding him curiously and who looked away quickly when his eyes rested on them. And he was assailed with doubts. Which was reality and which the dream. After all, here he was on one of the white men's boats, surrounded by warriors of his own race, fully armed and trained,—480 of them, Lisala's two best companies,—and was he not their commander? Only he was leading them against men of their own complexions instead of against the white masters.

For several hours Masua sat lost in thought. He allowed the memories that had been evoked by his sudden meeting with Yaja to overwhelm him more and more, and drifted back and forth between the strange world of the past and the stranger present. He reconsidered his great plan in the light of all that he had learned

## CONGO GODS

and of all that had occurred, and he found it good.

Fortune had indeed been with him. The dreams he dreamed as a lad had begun to take shape as living realities. In a vague way he felt that everything that had happened—even the loss of Yaja—had been for the best, and that his career and his destiny were marked out for him by the gods.

His great plan, his vision, that had lain dormant in his mind now rose up and took shape, and called insistently upon him. And it called not with the soft voice of Yaja but with the harsh, cracked voice of old Mozuri. . . .

Masua was ready.

For Yaja, too, that day was a memorable one. She did not have Masua's vivid imagination but her emotional life was much more turbulent than his, and what she felt she felt keenly. She lay in her cabin while vague feelings and memories drove over her like clouds across the

## MASUA AND YAJA

sky, forming one picture after another without any particular pattern. The appearance of Lucien on the *Kitamo* had already flooded her mind with memories of old forgotten things that were a part of that first year away from her native huts and trees, and now the dramatic return of Masua from the realm of the dead plunged her into an even deeper past,—a past infinitely more real than the present could be.

Fate had undoubtedly played her an unkind trick in bringing together on the decks of the *Kitamo* the three men whom she had loved.

Lucien Dubois, the white child, she had loved because he was weak and because he needed her. With Bangsbo it was different. She loved him with a passion she had never felt for any other man. In her heart she knew that he didn't love her, that she was merely a plaything for him, and more than once she had determined to leave him. But she never did. When she was in his presence she felt little and powerless: she was no

## CONGO GODS

longer the proud Yaja who had wound many a white man around her finger, but only a little black girl who came to him, meekly and humbly, when he called her. He met her ardor with aloofness and their embrace was the embrace of fire and ice.

And now here was Masua, returned from the dead.

He should have stayed home in Lufari, as she had told him, and in due time succeeded his father as Chieftain of the village, and she would have been his *Katenge*. Instead he had conceived this absurd idea of becoming a soldier in order to fight the whites with their own *mayele*, and had made both of them homeless and rootless. And then his unutterable folly in falling overboard had made her a widow, and had thrown her on the mercies of the white men.

But of course he was Masua, her Masua, and she was his. There could be no question about that.

The conversation she managed to have with

## MASUA AND YAJA

him that night (with some difficulty for even a native girl has a reputation to lose when she is the Commander's official *menagère*) was neither encouraging nor illuminating.

She was accustomed to having her own way with men, but she found out that Masua was almost as difficult to manage as Bangsbo. She could neither wind him around her finger nor herself around his heart. He told her very little about himself, and nothing at all about his plans, but he found out everything about her except her passion for her *Commanda*, Colonel Bangsbo. This she instinctively kept to herself.

They stood on the little bridge that leads from the stern alongside the noisy paddle wheel which churned up the boiling water below them and splattered them with its spray.

"What now, Masua," Yaja asked him at length.

"For the present, nothing. Stay with Bangsbo for a while longer. When you have become a widow then you can return to me."



## CONGO GODS

Yaja pressed close up to him and tried to make out the expression on his face. "What do you mean, a widow?" she asked him.

He paused a moment before he answered her. When he did, he said merely, "You women call yourselves widows when your white men leave you, do you not? He is going to leave you on the conclusion of this expedition. That will not be long now."

His indifference wounded her. That she might not betray her mortification she began to tell him about her account at the bank of Congo, and how it grew.

She had 9,750 francs lying in the bank—she knew to a centime the exact amount. And her money had children, she told Masua—four times a year it begot children.

Masua refused to be impressed. "That is what the white men call interest," he told her.

Yaja brushed aside this information. "Money is a powerful fetish," she said. "And what is Sergeant Masua's fetish—his *mitako*?"

## MASUA AND YAJA

It was a clever thrust. The *mitako* are the brass bars which pass as currency among the natives; but by a natural transfer of meaning the word is used to designate the gold braid on the sleeves that indicates rank in the army.

Masua felt the sting, and for a moment he was silent, sunk in thought. It was the same Yaja, she whose impudence had always been one of her charms.

But he answered her without any apparent emotion. "What can I do? Bangsbo is a white man and the commander-in-chief. Can I go to him and say, 'Yaja is my wife. You must give her to me?'"

Yaja did not dare give expression to her thoughts. Her pride would not permit her to say that if the matter were explained to him, Bangsbo would probably be glad to give her up to Masua. Even at the risk of losing Masua she couldn't make that confession. So she said nothing.

## CONGO GODS

Captain Hartley ran the *Kitamo* at full speed all day and a large part of the night. He hated to see the decks of his handsome boat cluttered up with native soldiers who got everything in a precious mess, and he breathed a deep sigh of relief when he finally disembarked the two companies at Basoko, and steamed on to Stanleyville.

Carl Bangsbo was too familiar with the ways of the Congo and Congo armies to "go into the bush" with soldiers and officers whom he did not know, no matter how urgent the crisis. Consequently he made preparations for at least two weeks of intensive drilling before venturing upon a campaign. He wanted to be sure of his men, too, and to add to them some of the veterans of earlier campaigns stationed at Basoko.

Besides, he had a campaign of his own to fight.

## CHAPTER XIV

### REVENGE

BOTH in Africa and elsewhere there are misanthropes who insist that the white man differs but little from the Congo negro, except in the color of his skin. The fallacy of such a point of view is apparent when we consider for a moment the superiority that white men show in torturing their enemies. Even Masua had noticed that white men did not need to resort to blows or angry words, but stabbed each other instead with the most innocent questions.

Colonel Bangsbo's meeting with District Superintendent van der Putte was a star performance.

They observed all the social amenities, their

## CONGO GODS

smiles were affable and even genial, their conversation apparently cordial, and the most cutting sarcasms were uttered in the suavest tones.

After the first greetings were over, van der Putte inquired elaborately to what he owed the pleasure of welcoming Colonel Bangsbo back to Basoko. Surely, he said, it could have nothing to do with that little affair that the District Judge, in his exaggerated and highly lamentable zeal, had communicated to the authorities at Boma?

"Oh, that," Bangsbo waved it aside pleasantly. "Rather amusing, that, was it not?" His good friend, Governor Deitrich, had handed all the papers of the case over to him, he explained, and they had been the source of no little amusement in official circles. He smiled at the recollection. . . .

Van der Putte smiled, too, but rather wryly. He remembered the postscript that he had added, but to Bangsbo he said that he was "profoundly pleased."

## REVENGE

Bangsbo inquired anxiously about the situation in the Lomami District. Had the insurrection spread?

The District Superintendent answered evasively. Conditions, he was glad to say, were not as bad as they had been reported. . . . The outlook was not unsatisfactory.

Colonel Bangsbo regretted the necessity for fuller information. His commission—which he now had the pleasure of laying before M. van der Putte,—gave him absolute authority over the District, and he would have to request the fullest coöperation from the District Superintendent.

There was an awkward pause while van der Putte carefully read through Colonel Bangsbo's credentials. Only a very obtuse Congo negro would have thought that the set smile on his face was sincere. He read them through twice, while he mentally considered whether he dared refuse to recognize their validity. He reviewed the arguments he could marshal for so extraor-

## CONGO GODS

dinary a course, and found them sadly wanting. . . . He considered resigning on the spot . . . on the ground that he had suffered an unpardonable affront in thus being superseded in command. But beyond doubt the Governor had foreseen that eventuality; in fact, it was probably just what he wanted, and van der Putte felt certain that Bangsbo carried in his coat pocket the appointment as his successor. He decided that there was nothing to be gained by a premature resignation . . . he would only make himself ridiculous.

There was obviously no course open to him but capitulation, a graceful and apparently voluntary acquiescence to the inevitable. Later, perhaps, with the aid of his friends in Belgium . . .

Bangsbo followed up his first victory relentlessly. Thus far it had been easy, but he was not done with his erstwhile enemy yet.

He proceeded to make a number of requisitions upon van der Putte, indicated certain

## REVENGE

changes in the administrative personnel which he thought desirable, and laid out the plans for the Lomami campaign. To all of this van der Putte assented cordially, though he was not unaware that some of Bangsbo's changes were rather high-handed infringements upon his own prerogatives.

And finally, since the District Superintendent had not extended his hospitality to his new military superior, Bangsbo fired his parting shot.

"And," he said, "while you are seeing to the details of the arrangements for the soldiers, I shall be pleased to pay my respects to Madame van der Putte."

Van der Putte started. He was on the point of replying that he would prefer that their relations be strictly official and that for all matters of business he was to be found at his office. Bangsbo had at one time been somewhat more intimate with Madame than was pleasing to her lord and master. . . . He was about to



## CONGO GODS

blurt this out, when something in Bangsbo's gaze stopped him.

Bangsbo was still smiling, but there was a hard, steely glint in his eye that his adversary could not mistake. It said as plainly as if it had been written in letters of gold three feet high, "I have read your postscript to the Governor, and I am determined to have my revenge. If you forbid me your home, I will make a scene and force you to call me out on the field of honor, and then I will shoot you. Because you stabbed me in the back, I am going to make a cuckold of you. . . . Take your choice."

Van der Putte was a civilized man, and he had no desire to exchange shots with this bandit who was reputed to be the best shot in the service. He had, too, a certain confidence in Madame's virtue. So he stifled his natural desire to tell Bangsbo to go to the Devil, and replied, instead:

"Capital, my dear fellow, capital. You know the way, do you not? . . . I shall see you later

## REVENGE

at tea. And, of course, you will do us the honor of dining with us to-night. *Au revoir*, my dear Colonel."

Bangsbo ignored the proffered hand, cocked his cap jauntily on one side of his head, and with a curt, "*Au revoir*," clattered down the steps of the veranda and stalked off down the path whistling merrily.

That very evening, perhaps to make assurance doubly sure, van der Putte initiated his wife into the situation, and sought to make it clear to her that Bangsbo was their deadly enemy. They would have to keep up the formalities, of course, but further than that. . . .

He circled round the subject like a cat around a bowl of warm milk, but Adèle van der Putte was no fool. She knew what he was driving at. She contented herself, however, with remarking, "You shouldn't have added that stupid postscript in the first place. You should have known that Bangsbo and Deitrich were thick as thieves, and that the Governor dislikes

## CONGO GODS

you because you may be his successor. . . . You have made your bed, my friend, and now you will have to lie in it."

As a matter of fact, van der Putte's warning came too late. The fair Adèle had been surprised at her siesta by Bangsbo, whom she thought on the high seas, and a surprise attack in love, as in war, when properly followed up, is usually successful.

## CHAPTER XV

### CONGO LOVE

LUCIEN sat on the little screened-in veranda of his old house at Basoko. He was in a despondent mood. In view of the fact that he was thinking of his fiancée, Marietta Fromont, this was most ungallant of him.

Marietta wasn't altogether responsible for his mood this morning, however. Lucien was soured on life in general. The whole thing, he thought bitterly, was a swindle.

Take this matter of rank. Here he was a commissioned officer, half a grade below second lieutenant. He had earned his promotion through three years of arduous labor, and he felt that he was entitled to its benefits. But for the moment his position had no significance

## CONGO GODS

whatsoever, for there was no one at Basoko of lower rank than himself. He was still "little Dubois," still the office boy of the other officers.

His thoughts wandered from one grievance to another. Everything seemed disappointing this morning, his rank, his fiancée, his whole career out here which, he recognized in a burst of resentment, was typified by the nickname the blacks had bestowed on him. These names that they gave a man were likely to be of some importance, for they indicated the impression he made on them, and often influenced the authorities in questions of promotion. Why the devil, then, hadn't the donkeys called him *N'Koy*—the Leopard, as they did Bangsbo, or *N'Deke Lipumbo*—the White Bird, as they did Captain Jantzen, of *Mayele-Mungo*—Heavenly Wisdom, as they did Captain Hartley, or *Kitoko*, the Beautiful, or anything under the sun but the half-affectionate, half-contemptuous, *Moani pembe*—White Child.

He would never in the world be appointed a

## CONGO LOVE

District Superintendent with that nickname plastered onto him, or even a Station Chief. The Devil take these blacks, anyway, with their sly, impudent, thievish ways.

Lucien's thoughts drifted to Yaja. That that Dane, Bangsbo, should come and literally snatch her from his embrace,—it was the last straw. They took everything, these strong men. Marietta had been right. "If you would have women love you, you must be strong," she had said.

And now to lose Yaja . . . the adorable, the bewitching Yaja, just when he had found her again. If he was to be honest with himself, he must admit that he would willingly give up Marietta if he could but embrace Yaja once more. . . . It was her he wanted, not Marietta Fromont.

What if he prayed to God and the Saints? He folded his hands reverently, but parted them again, terrified at his audacity. What blasphemy was this! Praying to the good white

## CONGO GODS

God (Lucien's mental image of God was the traditional one of a kindly old man with a long white beard and a halo around his head) for a black girl.

If he had to pray, he reflected, it ought to be to Yaja's God—a highly indecent gleaming—black wooden idol. That might have some efficacy. Of course, he wouldn't exactly *pray*, he would merely concentrate on Yaja's idol and wish for her.

It was Yaja he wanted, and if he got her through her own fetish, all the better.

About an hour later Colonel Bangsbo came striding down the path, turned aside into Lucien's garden, stepped inside the porch and seated himself on a camp stool. Even in his amazement at this visit Lucien had enough wit left to offer him a glass of beer, which he accepted gracefully.

"Listen, Dubois," he asked directly, when he had drained his glass, "do you want Yaja back?"

## CONGO LOVE

Lucien almost dropped his glass of beer, he was so astounded. He had hardly expected his prayer to be answered as quickly as this.

"You needn't look so nonplussed, Dubois," Bangsbo continued. "You know as well as I do that she's not nearly so bad as her reputation. Now see here, man, I can't take her along into the field with me, and when this expedition is over I'm going back home, and it's quite unlikely that I'll ever come out again. I don't fancy the idea of turning her out and letting her run wild. Now she was your woman, originally, and she herself has told me that she was fonder of you than of any other white man she ever lived with. . . . If it's agreeable to you, then, I'll send her over here. What do you say?"

What Lucien finally said when he recovered the power of speech, Bangsbo never knew, for he left in the middle of an incoherent jumble of thanks.

"The Devil takes care of his own," thought Lucien as he gaped at his departing guest, and



## CONGO GODS

then shuddered at his own audacity. He was not sure that it was not Yaja's horrible little fetish, which had performed this miracle. . . . And, after all, perhaps it was,—with the aid of Madame Adèle van der Putte, who had wrung from Bangsbo a promise to get rid of the seductive chocolate girl.

Father Daniels had he known all the circumstances, would have agreed with Lucien that the whole thing was the work of the Devil.

But whoever was responsible for the initiation of the miracle,—the Devil, Yaja's fetish, or Mozuri's God,—was not powerful enough to carry it to completion. For Yaja took her dismissal somewhat differently from what Carl Bangsbo had expected.

He had been prepared for something of a scene,—tears and protests, and perhaps some recrimination, and he had steeled himself against all this, and provided a heart balm for her in the form of a check.

But Yaja neither wept nor protested nor

## CONGO LOVE

recriminated. She said not a word. She merely stood and stared at Bangsbo for a few moments, parted her lips as if to say something, but gave it up with a little gesture of resignation, turned on her heel, and walked slowly away.

"Better leave her alone for a day or two," Bangsbo thought, and stuffed the check back into his coat pocket. "She probably has her pride, too."

He had told her, in the most friendly fashion in the world, that he couldn't possibly take her along on the expedition, and that, since he was going back to Europe as soon as it was over, she would do best to go to the little white man, Lieutenant Dubois, who was anxious to have her again.

Curious that she seemed to take this dismissal more to heart than the separation, a few weeks earlier, at Leopoldville. She had been quite sensible then, but of course she had been better prepared for it.

"Who would have thought the wench would

## CONGO GODS

take it so hard. . . . Confound it, anyway! . . . What if she should do something rash. . . . She might even drown herself,—you never can tell with these natives. . . .”

The idea made Bangsbo decidedly uncomfortable. He discovered that he was more warmly attached to Yaja than he had suspected. For the first time it occurred to him that he had a certain responsibility to her.

But Yaja didn't drown herself. As Bangsbo suspected, she had her pride. She returned a few hours later, accompanied by three stalwart natives, who busied themselves, under her direction, in packing and carrying away her belongings. When she was ready to leave, she came over to Bangsbo and proffered her hand—a slender, beautifully formed little bronze hand.

“Good-by, *Commanda*,” she said simply.

“Good-by, Yaja. Are you going to the little Dubois?” He was surprised at the gentleness of his own voice.

## CONGO LOVE

"No, *Mondelle*, I am going back to my own man, Sergeant Masua, whom I thought dead, but who is still alive. I shall have no more white men."

And quite simply she turned and walked away, her little bare feet pattering across the veranda and down the steps and on down the path between the mango trees whose dark green branches, heavy laden with yellow fruit, seemed to bend toward her and embrace her. Never once did she turn to look back.

Bangsbo stood and stared down the path as long as she was in sight. Had she looked back but once he would have called to her. . . . He discovered that she had entwined herself around his heart rather more than he cared to admit, the bronze wench. He remembered a poem that Captain Jantzen had read to him a long time ago—old Jantzen who fancied himself quite a poet. He had smiled then, he remembered, at the idea of getting sentimental over a black girl.

How did it go, now,—

## CONGO GODS

Lovely heathen goddess,  
Fashioned in black leather,  
Tropic nature's masterpiece her work of art.  
Filled with love of living,  
Beautiful and sinless,  
Born without a soul, and without tears for  
weeping.

Not so bad, that . . . exaggerated, of course.  
Jantzen was a rummy sort of a fellow.

Filled with love of living, beautiful and  
sinless,  
Born without a soul, and without tears for  
weeping.

Yes, that was Yaja.  
And he hadn't even given her the check.

## CHAPTER XVI

### STORM CLOUDS

THE fortnight that Bangsbo had considered necessary for drilling and training the expeditionary force had been found insufficient, and still another week had been devoted to instruction in field tactics and to putting a final polish on the army. Three weeks of ceaseless activity, of bustle and preparation and excitement and anticipation.

From early morning till night the drill grounds echoed and reëchoed with hoarse commands, the signal of bugles, and the regular tramp of hundreds of bare feet on the hard-packed clay. The thin blue lines turned and wheeled, broke up and reformed and executed the most complicated maneuvers with a snap and precision that

## CONGO GODS

might well be the envy of heavy-booted European soldiers.

The military parade that had made Masua's heart leap with delight when he first witnessed it back in Lisala, was still his greatest joy. His platoon was, by common consent, the best trained and smartest in the battalion—the crack platoon of them all. The white lieutenants could drive theirs unmercifully, day after day, but they never attained that complete mastery over their men that Masua seemed to have without any effort at all. Every soldier of Masua's platoon seemed to be connected to him by invisible threads, and they maneuvered as one body, whose brain was the slender Kasai sergeant with the quiet voice and the nervous, twitching fingers.

The soldiers,—all of them,—were extraordinarily well behaved. There were few infractions of the rules and no misdemeanors, nor was there any trace of that sullen, stubborn obedience that is characteristic of a force on the verge of

## STORM CLOUDS

mutiny. . . . Every provision was made for their material comfort, for their health and provisioning. By all the rules of the game they should have been wholly loyal, and so they were, —but it was Masua, and not Bangsbo, who held their loyalty in the hollow of his hand.

There were very few of the natives who knew what it was all about, or had even the vaguest conception of Masaua's plans. But there was something in the air—something imperceptible. Even the unusually good behavior of the force was an indication of it, and one that should have aroused the suspicions of so experienced a Commander as Carl Bangsbo. He had been in the midst of the famous Lulianbourg mutiny and had quelled it. But it was different then—a long smoldering fire that finally burst into flame on some quite petty provocation. . . . Nothing like that here at Basoko.

Then, again, perhaps Colonel Bangsbo was too preoccupied with Adèle van der Putte to take the pulse of the army as often as he should.



## CONGO GODS

And Yaja, who might have warned him (it is highly probable that she was privy to the plans of Masua)—Yaja he had dismissed at the demand of the fair Adèle. She had insisted on faithfulness in Bangsbo, just as Marietta had insisted on faithfulness in Lucien. And Bangsbo, who had violated the taboo he so long held sacred, was now to be punished because he ceased to violate it any longer.

The Fetish-men will be able to explain this and to point the moral. That is what they are for.

Once again the great mess hall, which since van Gele's time had stood empty and desolate, a forlorn witness to the dullness of the new régime, resounded with life and gayety when the officers of the Lomami Expedition dined and supped together with some of the more favored civilians. The less-favored—and Lucien was among them—grumbled and sulked, but even Heaven wouldn't be much fun if there weren't

## STORM CLOUDS

some who had to be content with fire and brimstone.

On the eve of the departure of the expedition to Lomami, Superintendent van der Putte gave a banquet to which all the whites, both military and civilian, were invited. . . . All day the Superintendent was in fine mettle. The prospect of ridding himself of his unwelcome guests the next day and once more being cock of the walk put him in rare good humor and he outdid himself in geniality and hospitality.

In the morning there was a full dress parade, and van der Putte, arrayed in the uniform of a brigadier general, stood in the reviewing stand. Even his unpracticed eye noticed the smartness and precision of the men. No matter how completely civilian a man may be, there is something in his blood that responds instinctively to the tramp of marching feet, the blare of bugles and the booming of drums. Van der Putte was no exception. Though he was anything but a military man, and something of a duffer at sol-

## CONGO GODS

diering, he took a childish delight in the color and sound of it all,—the blue red-striped uniforms, the gleaming bayonets, all pointing at the same angle, the sharp precision of the squad formations, the hoarse staccato commands, the banners flying in the breeze. And as the column passed the reviewing stand every eye left, every hand at salute, van der Putte felt himself truly the cock of the walk.

Later in the day he received Captain Hartley, who, after unloading at Stanleyville, had steamed up to Basoko to embark the troops and carry them to Isangi, which was to be the base of operations. Van der Putte at once extended a cordial invitation to the banquet that night. He was unusually animated as he led the way to the veranda where Colonel Bangsbo and Adèle were sitting.

Madame Adèle's deep blue eyes were, if possible, a shade deeper than usual, and her Rubenesque figure,—well—you can see a painting of her hanging in the Viart galleries. She was a

## STORM CLOUDS

beauty, there could be no question about that, and Africa hadn't taken its toll of her yet—at least, not noticeably.

"There's life in the old girl," Hartley thought to himself. "She is usually rather listless." He bent over gallantly and touched his lips to her hand. "Could it be . . . ?"

He turned to Bangsbo, who looked as he always looked, tall and handsome, perfectly groomed and perfectly poised, and greeted him casually enough, but a look of understanding flashed between the two men.

Van der Putte rubbed his hands together in an overflow of amiability. "I have just been telling Captain Hartley that we are going to make a real evening of it,—an evening like those Basoko was famous for in the days of my predecessor, good old van Gele. 'We will have military music and we will all drink the morning in. . . . You, my dear,' turning to his wife, 'you must be prepared to have me stagger home pretty well lit.'"

## CONGO GODS

Madame Adèle laughed softly. "Indeed I should be delighted to see you that way. It would be a new experience."

Van der Putte continued unabashed. "The parade this morning was splendid, was it not, my dear Bangsbo? When our brave Commander and his dashing army marched past my reviewing stand, I felt like a veritable Cæsar. *Ave Cæsar, morituri te salutant!* . . . Gentlemen, your health!"

The District Superintendent had discovered that it annoyed Bangsbo considerably to be referred to as "our brave Commander" or "our dashing chief," and he took what pleasure he could in thus irritating him.

"Are you aware that you are to be carried aboard ship to-night, Captain Hartley?" Adèle asked facetiously.

"Quite in the tradition. . . . You know Marryat's line—'Who goes there? Drunken officer on a wheelbarrow,' " Hartley quoted.

Bangsbo roused himself from his lethargy.

## STORM CLOUDS

"No mortal man will ever carry old Hartley aboard on a wheelbarrow. . . . He will sit there and calmly drink every one of us under the table, and then he'll go on his ship and mix himself a stiff whisky and soda to get rid of the champagne taste. I've seen him do it many a time in van Gele's day. . . . He has a cast-iron stomach."

After tea Bangsbo accompanied Captain Hartley back to the *Kitamo*. They were old friends.

"Pretty sultry up there," Hartley observed. "It looks like we have the old fellow eating crow. He grins like a man with a toothache who had decided to go to the dentist. Are you having an affair with Madame Adèle, you Casanova?"

"Between you and me and the door, there, I am. She is a tender morsel. . . . He tried to stab me in the back, you know."

"And you haven't even the decency to lie about it," Hartley grinned. "You'll come to no good end, you devil. You'll be either shot or married."

## CONGO GODS

"You're the only one who knows about this and you, fortunately, are the soul of discretion. If no one knew it, it wouldn't be a revenge, would it? Of course you'll keep it to yourself, old man."

"Why the devil should I keep it to myself any more than you do?" Hartley demanded indignantly. "It's a choice bit of gossip, and you can be sure the Governor shall hear of it. He will break his back laughing, old Deitrich. He commanded me most particularly to see how the land lay up here."

"All the same, you won't gossip. It's not like you. . . . Well, au revoir until to-night. I'll call for you. . . ."

Bangsbo was in a bad humor that evening as he made his way to the *Kitamo* to fetch Hartley. He felt that the situation was getting out of hand, and it was a sensation new to him. In the first place he regretted that he had involved himself so deeply with Adèle van der Putte.

## STORM CLOUDS

Now she was talking about going back to Europe with him, and that was considerably more than he had bargained for. One couldn't be light and casual with women, he reflected rather bitterly. . . . In the second place he was dissatisfied with himself. His relations with Adèle made him uncomfortable, and his treatment of Yaja scarcely less so. Life as he was living it conflicted rather ruthlessly with those moral laws with which he had been impregnated from childhood, with those standards of right and wrong and with the many "Thou shalt not's" which he had been taught to respect. He had broken the taboos, and he was learning that he could not do that with impunity.

Bangsbo was not of a speculative turn of mind and he came to no more profound conclusion about it all than his comment to Hartley, "The Devil must have created woman in a fit of temper."

"And God created man, I suppose," Hartley replied.



## CONGO GODS

"The Lord forbid."

"I know what is the matter with you, my boy, and if it would do you any good I'd offer my deep sympathy. But it wouldn't. It's all your own fault, anyway. You could stop being such a damn heart-breaker. All I can do for you now is pour you a stiff whisky and soda,—and you'll get enough of that to-night. . . . Well, I see the natives are having a celebration of their own to-night. Your whole army seems to be wandering over toward the village."

Hartley was right. In small parties of twos and threes all the troops were streaming over in the direction of Itchmbu's village, where there was to be a dance. The real magnet, however, though neither Hartley nor Bangsbo suspected it, was not this festivity, but the rumor that Sergeant Masua was going to make a speech to his black brothers, and that he had something important to announce.

Night comes to the tropics with an abruptness unknown to Europe. Within a few min-

## STORM CLOUDS

utes darkness had descended over the land and the river, and scores of flickering camp-fires announced that the women of Itchumbu's village were preparing a feast.

A black bugler came out on the veranda of the mess hall, spat vigorously and puffed out his cheeks. The lively notes of the mess call blared out into the night air.

Old Hartley put his glass down—empty, of course—and hummed the words.

The officers' wives get cake and roast,  
Soldiers' wives get poooooooooooooridge.

He and Bangsbo arose and strolled out to join the others, thirty-two altogether, including four women, who were strolling over toward the mess hall.

They could hear, as they approached it, the tinkle of the cocktail glasses as the black Boys filled them.



## CHAPTER XVII

### THE BANQUET

As the wine flowed and the glasses clicked, the atmosphere of the banquet became more and more informal, but it is doubtful if M. van der Putte's guests ever threw off restraint as completely during the evening as did the natives who had gathered in Itchumbu's village to hear what Sergeant Masua had to say.

Here were the leading chieftains from all the near-by villages, each with his following, and here were all the soldiers from the camp at Basoko. At one end of the village the women danced, and the muffled beat of the tom-toms served as a sort of chorus to the drama that was being enacted.

## CONGO GODS

Once more Masua stood in the center of a circle, as he had four years ago, and called on his black brothers to support him in his plans. But it was a vastly different Masua who stood here now, in his Sergeant's uniform, with his own platoon massed behind him, and scores of local chiefs and hundreds of warriors hanging on his words.

He began quite simply, in a low, conversational voice, without any exaggeration or bombast, by telling them a number of things they knew perfectly well already. He told them how the first white men had come to their land, and how, in the beginning, they spoke in the voice of friendship of the brotherhood of man, and how they had tried to introduce new gods. He told of how Bula-Matadi, whom the white men called Stanley, made an alliance with the chiefs of the lower Congo for the furtherance of trade, an alliance, originally, between equals. He went on to tell how, in the course of time, the insatiable greed of the white men had led them

## THE BANQUET

to exploit not only the land but the natives as well, and how the white men, with their superior weapons and with the aid of native mercenaries, had shorn the chieftains of all but a shadow of their ancient power and had levied tribute on the free men of the Congo in the form of labor and had reduced them to slaves.

All of this the chieftains knew from their own experience. They knew how they were forced to provide "volunteer" soldiers for the army of the white masters. They knew how they were forced to labor in the fields and go into the forests and gather rubber four days out of every seven. All this they knew, but it took on a sinister sound in Masua's telling.

As he proceeded with the story of their oppression and enslavement, there arose a low, ominous muttering from the ranks of the soldiers, which soon spread to the other natives and was hurled back on Masua. The truth from the lips of another seemed infinitely

## CONGO GODS

blacker than it ever had before. This, the bare, unvarnished truth, presented without exaggeration or flourish, is the essence of all revolutionary propaganda, and Masua spoke with an instinctive realization of this fact. As he developed his theme, his voice became charged with emotion, and rose and fell in response to the angry muttering of his hearers. . . .

When he had finished, there was a moment of silence. Then the ancient war song of the Bangala rose to the moon and the stars:

The earth is dry, it thirsts,  
The earth is dry, it thirsts,  
    But not for rain.  
The earth is dry, it thirsts,  
The earth is dry, it thirsts,  
    For Blood.

Under the influence of good food and even better wine, the banquet was progressing famously. Considering that half of those present were deadly enemies of the other half, the affair was really an excellent imitation of one of

## THE BANQUET

the festive evenings in the "good old days" of the van Gele régime.

Even the ladies, who, since their arrival at Basoko Station, had been at dagger's points with one another, said "my dear" and even "darling" to each other and praised each other's toilettes fulsomely. When

*Kisangula au Gratin*  
*Jeune Antelope*  
*Choux Palmiste*  
*Champagne*

had been served, District Superintendent van der Putte arose and delivered a very spirited little address about his dear friend, "our brave Commander, Colonel Bangsbo," who, "though his term of service was ended, turned back on the very threshold of Europe to render one more signal service to humanity and civilization by suppressing the threatening rebellion in Lomami and advancing the cause of His Majesty's government in this dark region of the earth," etc.,



## CONGO GODS

etc. The speaker was confident that Colonel Bangsbo would add luster to the laurels he had already won on many a battle field, and that his name would go down in history as one of the Congo's most gallant heroes. He asked permission to quote, in conclusion, some lines from the distinguished English poet, Rudyard Kipling:

Take up the White Man's Burden—  
And reap his old reward:  
The blame of those ye better,  
The hate of those ye guard—  
The cry of hosts ye humor  
(Ah, slowly) toward the light:—  
Why brought ye us from bondage,  
Our loved Egyptian night?

"A health to our fearless leader, Colonel Bangsbo."

"Really quite well done," Hartley murmured to Bangsbo. "One might almost think that he meant it."

When the dessert—"chopped negro hands

## THE BANQUET

with whipped cream"—had been served, Bangsbo arose to express his gratitude and appreciation for the kind words of his host, without whose loyal coöperation the Expedition could never have been successfully organized. He felt, he asserted, that he and his fellow-officers should be particularly grateful to Madame van der Putte and the other ladies who had been willing to brave their husbands' lot, and who had succeeded in making life in Basoko a veritable paradise. . . . "To M. van der Putte and the ladies, Health."

The toast was drunk to the accompaniment of many covert smiles and knowing winks. Bangsbo's frequent and prolonged visits with Madame Adèle while her husband was on duty had not escaped the watchful eyes of the other officers and their wives. Van der Putte's smile seemed somewhat strained, and Madame Adèle's cheeks a little more flushed than usual as she touched glasses with Colonel Bangsbo.

Lieutenant Folley, who was already three

## CONGO GODS

sheets to the wind, began to bawl out, "*Il est coçu, le chef de gare,*" and was silenced by his friends only with considerable difficulty. Fortunately he sat at the other end of the table and van der Putte and the guests of honor were able to keep up the pretense that they had not heard the ribald interruption. The official speeches having been concluded, the banquet proceeded with even more informality. The Commissary told a risqué anecdote, the chief clerk sang a sentimental ditty, and all the time the general gayety and inebriety increased. . . . There was still a certain degree of respectability about it all, for the presence of the ladies acted as a brake upon the spirits of some of the most inebriated and light-hearted guests, and the ladies showed no evidences of wanting to retire. They had few enough pleasures, poor things, and this evening promised to be amusing.

Most of the men, by this time, were considerably under the weather. Hartley was talking politics with old von Meyer, the agronomist.

## THE BANQUET

Whenever he was under the influence of wine, Captain Hartley became philosophical and cynical, and now he shocked von Meyer profoundly by his irreverence toward such authorities as Flammarion, Bismarck, Moses and General Booth. Von Meyer was most painfully surprised and chagrined. Had it been any one but Hartley, *Mayele Mungo*, who said these things, he would have told him quite simply to go to the Devil. As it was he was forced to confine himself to "Your health, you old—hic—toper."

Little Lucien's contribution was a sentimental ballad about a Belgian mother who waited in vain for a letter from her son who lay dying of malaria in an African tent. In all probability she is still waiting, for long before he reached the last verse Lucien was overcome with emotion and tottered out of the room onto the veranda. He was miserable and sick. His hands trembled and his teeth clattered in his mouth and his eyes had a glazed stare in them.

## CONGO GODS

Limp as a wash rag, and without any control over his body, he hung over the railing until he finally slipped down on the cold brick floor of the veranda. He was the first one to go under, but some of the others were not far behind. Van der Putte himself was thick of speech and babbling incoherently.

And still the ladies didn't retire. Through the latticed windows Lucien could see Colonel Bangsbo, handsome as a Greek god, flirting outrageously with Madame Adèle, who submitted to his advances with apparent pleasure. The sight filled him with righteous indignation.

Why, she wasn't any better than an ordinary wench! And she the first lady of the Post!

His wrath emboldened him to action. With some difficulty he stumbled to his feet and, rather uncertainly, but, as he thought with great dignity, made his way across the veranda and down the steps, and tottered off into the darkness toward his own house. He was through with that swinish crowd up there. The Super-

## THE BANQUET

intendent's wife and the Commander. Ugh. . . . Oh, Lord, now he was sick again.

It seemed hours before he reached the veranda of his own house. He leaned up against one of the square pillars that supported the roof and gave himself over to his nausea.

Then suddenly he was aware that he was not alone. Over in the opposite corner he made out the vague outline of a dark figure, peering in the direction of the brilliantly illuminated mess hall.

Lucien looked more closely. It was—by all that was holy, it was Yaja. She had come back to him! He called her by name, and in his voice joy and physical misery were curiously blended.

He could see, in the darkness, that she turned toward him, peered at him dubiously, shrugged her shoulders and turned back to her intent observation of the hall.

"It's her beloved Bangsbo she's looking at, the hussy," Lucien thought. He was otherwise occupied that night. . . . He was going to drink

## CONGO GODS

the Superintendent under the table and make love to Madame Adèle while the whole Post looked on.—“*Ha, Ha, il est coçu, le chef de gare.*”

Lucien chuckled to himself, and at the sound Yaja came suddenly to life. Fast as a flickering shadow she was over by his side, placed her strong little hand over his mouth, and pressed his head into her bosom so firmly that he couldn't utter a sound. And while she covered and concealed him with her own dark body, he was aware of shadowy, fez-topped figures emerging from behind the houses of the Post and silently stealing across the drill grounds toward the festive mess hall, whence came the rollicking notes of Congo's unofficial national air—

“Then fill your mugs with Bergendorf.”

Lucien could see the burnished barrels of muskets gleaming wickedly in the moonlight, and

## THE BANQUET

he struggled to free himself, but in his weakened condition he was no match for Yaja and she held him as in a vise.

She bent over and put her lips to his ear.

"Be quiet, white child. It is death if they see you."

Lucien felt his muscles relax involuntarily, and his blood ran cold with fear. His brain, befuddled with alcohol, had not yet fully grasped the situation, but his instinct told him that Yaja was right,—that it was Death, the quick, cruel, undisguised African death, that passed by him in the night.

"What the Devil!" yelled Bangsbo.

From all five windows of the six-cornered mess room there protruded shining steel rifle barrels, and behind them the tattooed faces of black men.

A single piercing shriek rent the night air, and one of the ladies swooned. Von Meyer and Hartley staggered to their feet.



## CONGO GODS

In a flash Carl Bangsbo realized what was about to happen, and, suddenly quite sober, his eye met Sergeant Masua's for the fraction of a second. Masua stood in the center of the main door, with his musket at his cheek, and aimed directly at Bangsbo's heart.

"Why the Devil doesn't the fellow shoot?" thought Bangsbo.

Masua gave a sharp command. There was a thundering crash, a roar like all the earth's oceans cascading through space, and in the ears of Colonel Carl Bangsbo it died away in a noise of silver bells, as his body tumbled heavily on the table with its wine-spattered cloth.

That same ear-splitting roar was the last sound that Captain Hartley and a score of others ever heard.

A few heard two volleys, and one—Adèle van der Putte—heard three.

She had leapt up at the first volley, and when Bangsbo fell she flung her arms around him in an effort to support his body.

## THE BANQUET

The salvos came hard on each other, and the infuriated natives kept on shooting long after the last white had been killed. The soft cartridges plowed and tore wherever they hit, and made the festive dining hall a shambles. '



## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE LAST ACT

LYING cowering and quaking on the brick floor of the veranda, his brain stupefied with alcohol and his limbs paralyzed with fear, Lucien heard the thunderous volleys from the mess hall and realized what was happening. For the moment he was alone. Yaja had left him to follow the soldiers. It was all over in a few minutes,—the shooting and the yelling, but to Lucien it seemed an eternity before the confused din gave way to a low babble of voices and Yaja came back to him.

Her shoulders were heaving with sobs, and she who was ordinarily so sure-footed and graceful, stumbled as she walked, and almost fell over his inert body.

## CONGO GODS

"*M'wani pembe?* Is it you, white child? . . . Masua is out of his mind. He has killed the *Commanda* and all of the whites. You must fly."

But Lucien only moaned. His whole world had come crashing down about him, and he was utterly incapable of action or of thought.

While Yaja stood there above him, they heard the voice of Masua—that voice which had excited the admiration and envy of his brother officers—ordering his soldiers to fire the Post and man the *Kitamo*. . . . It was Masua's moment of triumph, the realization of his dream.

"You must fly, white child," Yaja repeated. "There is no time to lose."

But Lucien lay motionless, palsied by terror.

And then when she realized what a pitiable condition he was in, she lifted him to his feet, took him by the hand, and half-dragged, half-pushed him through the darkness along the path that led to the river. There was a little canoe

## THE LAST ACT

at the foot of the path, and Yaja fetched a couple of paddles from one of the native huts, and shoved off with Lucien, down the river, to safety.

Captain Jantzen of the *Cleo*, who came steaming up from Irebu, took them aboard late the next afternoon just above Bumba.

Lucien was half-crazed with fright. From the canoe he had seen the red tongue of flame licking up from the mess hall, and watched it consume the whole of Basoko Post in one huge bonfire, and he had heard the savage war cries of Masua's soldiers as they boarded the *Kitamo*, and the triumphant, exultant war song of the Bangala followed Yaja and him as they fled down the river.

Captain Jantzen found it impossible to get any coherent story from him, but with the reluctant aid of Yaja he was able to piece together a fairly clear picture of what must have happened at the Post.

## CONGO GODS

Immediately he swung the little *Cleo* around and steamed back to Bumba to give the alarm, and to disembark all the passengers. Then, with adequate reënforcements from the military post there he turned back up the river for a preliminary reconnaissance.

He tried to persuade Lucien to accompany him back to the scene of the carnage, but the little fellow showed such mortal terror at the very idea that the Captain was forced to abandon any hope of using him for a guide, and put him off at Bumba with the rest of the passengers. Yaja, however, was compelled to return up the river with the *Cleo* and its Captain.

The next day the little *Deliverance VI*, the boat which had first brought Lucien into the heart of the Congo, was sent downstream to give warning to all the posts and stations, and Lucien was permitted to go along with it to Boma. Here, since he continued apparently in a state of semi-collapse, and was obviously unfitted for further duty, he received an invalid

## THE LAST ACT

certificate from the medical office and an honorable discharge from the civil administration, and was allowed to take passage to Belgium, home and mamma.

Not until he was well out on the Atlantic, far away from the Congo and its murderous natives, did Lucien begin to recover somewhat from his prostration and feel a sense of security.

On his return to Belgium he found that the story of the tragedy at Basoko and his own miraculous escape had preceded him, and he was famous. He was the only survivor of the massacre, and he was interviewed, quoted and photographed to his heart's content.

After a brief examination a doctor certified that his nervous system had been permanently impaired by the excitement and dangers to which he had been exposed, and the Colonial Office granted him a modest invalid pension. With the aid of this he established himself in a little glove and perfumery shop in Rue Neuf,



## CONGO GODS

Brussels, and shortly afterwards married his—and Holmsteen's—Marietta.

So far there are two children—a curly-headed little girl who looks for all the world like Lucien, and a boy—who is a little Swede. The glove and perfumery shop is prospering, and Lucien's health is so far recovered that he can attend the Colonial Club, of which he is an honorary member, three or four nights a week.

Here he sits and sips his beer or, on occasion, a whisky and soda, and discourses eloquently on the situation in the Congo, and the probabilities of Masua's desperate struggle ending in success. . . . Now that he is safely out of it all, it is very exciting, and his fellow club members listen to his descriptions of Masua with burning interest and hearken to his prophecies as to the words of an oracle.

There can be no doubt about it,—luck is with little Lucien at last. He has achieved both happiness and success. But then he was one of Father Daniels' faithful.

## THE LAST ACT

How Fate will treat Masua, who off and on doubted Mozuri's teachings and even half doubted Mozuri's God, only time will reveal.

THE

THE END



